

# News and Networks:

The Communication of Political Information  
in the Eighteenth-Century French Countryside

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# ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how political information was communicated in rural France in the eighteenth century and during the French Revolution. Early modern rural society is often portrayed as isolated from the current of events, due to factors such as poor-quality roads, an inefficient postal service and illiteracy. However, an examination of how information was disseminated in the countryside – from the royal proclamations of the Old Regime to the printed orders and decrees of revolutionary governments – demonstrates that rural municipal councils were overwhelmed with official material. Moreover, the Revolution was imposed upon a society in which oral communication networks already provided a means of gathering news and obtaining information, and these networks continued to function alongside the new system. Although the government believed that peasants were “led astray” by “incorrect information”, the echoes of rumours, news and opinions preserved in police and judicial archives in fact demonstrate that peasants understood much about politics, and formed intelligent opinions on current issues.

The choice of two contrasting regions of south-west France – the hills and winding rivers of Aquitaine and the pastoral mountain communities of the central Pyrenees – demonstrates the various means by which peasants connected with the outside world. Traditional administrative sources ground the study in an eighteenth-century institutional framework, and the innovative use of peasant testimony and personal accounts contained in revolutionary seditious speech trials allow us to “eavesdrop” on political conversations which took place in the villages and market towns of two centuries ago. Contributing to current historical debates on the political culture of the Revolution, the extension of the public sphere to include the lower classes, and the timing of peasant politicisation, this study demonstrates that despite government attempts to maintain a monopoly on political information, peasants actively participated in the public sphere, and their voices have not been lost.



*To My Parents*

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# CONVENTIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The spelling and grammar of citations from primary sources has been modernised, except in instances where the nature of the language enters into the argument.

Dates in the revolutionary calendar are not accompanied by Gregorian equivalents in the text: concordance charts can be found in Appendix A.

The following abbreviations have been used in reference to archival collections, publications, and scholarly associations:

## Archival and Library Collections

A.N.	Archives nationales (Paris)
A.D.	Archives départementales (followed by the name of the department)
B.M.	Bibliothèque municipale (followed by the name of the city)
B.N.	Bibliothèque nationale (Paris)

## Journals and Publications

A.h.R.f.	<i>Annales historiques de la Révolution française</i>
Annales: ESC	<i>Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations</i>
A.P.	<i>Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860: Recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des chambres françaises</i> (see Bibliography for complete citation)
B.S.H.A.P.	<i>Bulletin de la Société historique et archéologique du Périgord</i>
S.V.E.C.	<i>Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century</i>

## Societies and Research Groups

CNRS	Conseil National de Recherche Scientifique (Paris)
CTHS	Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques (Paris)
EHESS	École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Paris)
SFHS	Society for French Historical Studies (United States)
SSFH	Society for the Study of French History (United Kingdom)
WSFH	Western Society for French History (United States)



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Wilhelm Leibl, *Dorfpolitiker* (1876-1877).

Source: Stiftung Oskar Reinhart, Winterthur (Switzerland); Photo Stiftung Reinhart. Reproduced from Richard R. Brettell and Caroline B. Brettell, *Painters and Peasants in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1983), p.136.



## INTRODUCTION

One day in April 1794, a young woman by the name of Marie Bordet, the wife of an agricultural day-labourer in the Lot-et-Garonne, was going about her daily chores when she heard a knock at the door. When she opened it, she found an aging, ragged beggar. Marie did not have any bread, but she offered the old man something to drink, which he took gratefully, and asked if he might also warm himself by her fire. His name was Pierre Chaussonnel, and he spoke of a number of things which Marie did not entirely follow, she recounted later, including how he had been accused several days earlier of being an *aristocrat*. She did remember one thing in particular, however: he had heard, he said, of a decree recently sent out according to which the churches would no longer be closed, and that near Paris, they had already been reopened. This news had quite an effect on Mme Bordet, as it did on many of the other peasant women in the area;<sup>1</sup> for despite their protests, the village council had remained firm in its support of the laws of the revolutionary government, which stated that the churches could no longer be used for Catholic services. In fact, the news caused such a stir, that police authorities in the nearest town were quickly informed of the old beggar's presence, and brought him in for questioning. According to their report, Chaussonnel was far too old and decrepit to have acted with counter-revolutionary intent; indeed, they thought he was probably half senile. While it was clear that he posed no real threat to the established order, the authorities decided that he could not be left to wander the countryside either, spreading false rumours and alarming the peasants. Citing the Law of Suspects of September 1793, the local magistrate ordered him detained until peacetime returned.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this text, the general term 'peasant' will be used to refer to inhabitants of the countryside whose primary source of income was agriculture, including those living in villages and performing some artisanal tasks in addition to agricultural work. It excludes large landowners whose land would have been worked by day-labourers. The terminology, specifically relevant to the south-western departments studied here, which distinguished among categories of peasant (richer or poorer, landowner, sharecropper or day-labourer) will be studied in greater detail in chapter III. For an overview of the question, see Peter Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 7-15.

<sup>2</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-6 and 2L98-23, Tribunal révolutionnaire, procès contre Pierre Chaussonnel, mendiant, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires, germinal-floréal II. To calculate equivalent dates between the Revolutionary and Gregorian calendars, see Appendix A. The reader should also note that while

The account of Chaussonnel's arrest and trial for seditious speech hints at many of the questions which will be addressed in the chapters that follow. At first glance, the story appears to be about the degree to which important political information penetrated into the French countryside during the Revolution. Did the decree regarding the reopening of churches exist? And if so, why had Marie Bordet and her neighbours not been told about it? The Revolution represented one of the most precipitate explosions of written political discourse in world history: literally thousands of newspapers and tracts were produced by both professional and amateur writers, and the various revolutionary governments issued endless orders and decrees. The circulation of this official material was meant to ensure that everyone had the information required to fulfil his or her duty as a citizen of France: in the case recounted above, had the system malfunctioned? Perhaps the post had been delayed, or the municipal officers of Le Mas, the commune where Marie lived, had neglected their duties in announcing the decree.

As it turned out, no such decree existed.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the authorities were correct, and Chaussonnel's mistake was simply the result of his age or of his "faiblesse d'esprit", or perhaps he had intentionally misinformed Marie, for reasons at which we can only guess. Regardless of the truth or falsehood of Chaussonnel's words, the discovery and discussion of the supposed decree mattered a great deal to the inhabitants of Le Mas. The possibility that the churches might be reopened was not the only idea the old beggar had suggested, and for several days, the streets and workplaces of Le Mas echoed with politicised chatter.<sup>4</sup> Would Catholic worship return to normal? Would the district administrations be dismantled after the end of the war? Or rather, were the crowned heads of Europe so strong that they stood that very minute at France's doorstep? While some official information on these topics was certainly being disseminated, the Jacobin goal of civic education did not take into account the fact that other information networks were already well-established in the rural hinterland. As the episode with the beggar illustrates, news and ideas were being communicated, and opinions were being formed, in ways which were unanticipated by the authorities and beyond their control. Local administrative and police archives

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multiple references to the same trial documents will be abbreviated, a table detailing all trials in the sample used for this study can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>3</sup> The rumour, however, might have grown in response to news of the fall of the "dechristianising" Hébertistes.

<sup>4</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-6 and 2L98-23, procès contre Chaussonnel, floréal II. The topics of conversation are drawn from the seven witnesses whose testimony is recorded as part of Chaussonnel's trial.



abound in such accounts, revealing the importance of oral communication in the formation of political opinion in the eighteenth-century French countryside.

Using two separate regions in the south-west as examples, I will argue that the way in which information reached rural communities was crucial to the formation of peasant views of the revolutionary government and its policies. The first area, comprising the departments of the Dordogne and Lot-et-Garonne in the province previously known as Guyenne, was characterised by mixed-farming, nuclear village communities set in an environment of winding rivers and hills in the north, with the south being slightly more open.<sup>5</sup> Although both departmental capitals were situated on major roads, there were relatively few significant communications routes within the departments. The second region encompasses the frontier departments of the Hautes-Pyrénées and the Ariège, connected by the largest and southernmost district of the Haute-Garonne, based in Saint-Gaudens. The contrast between these more remote mountain villages with their largely pastoral economy, and the plains, forests and rivers of Aquitaine, demonstrates the richness of communicative practices in rural society, for although the former was considerably more isolated than the latter, and physically further from urban centres and particularly from the capital, news about political events and ideas still circulated with remarkable ease.<sup>6</sup>

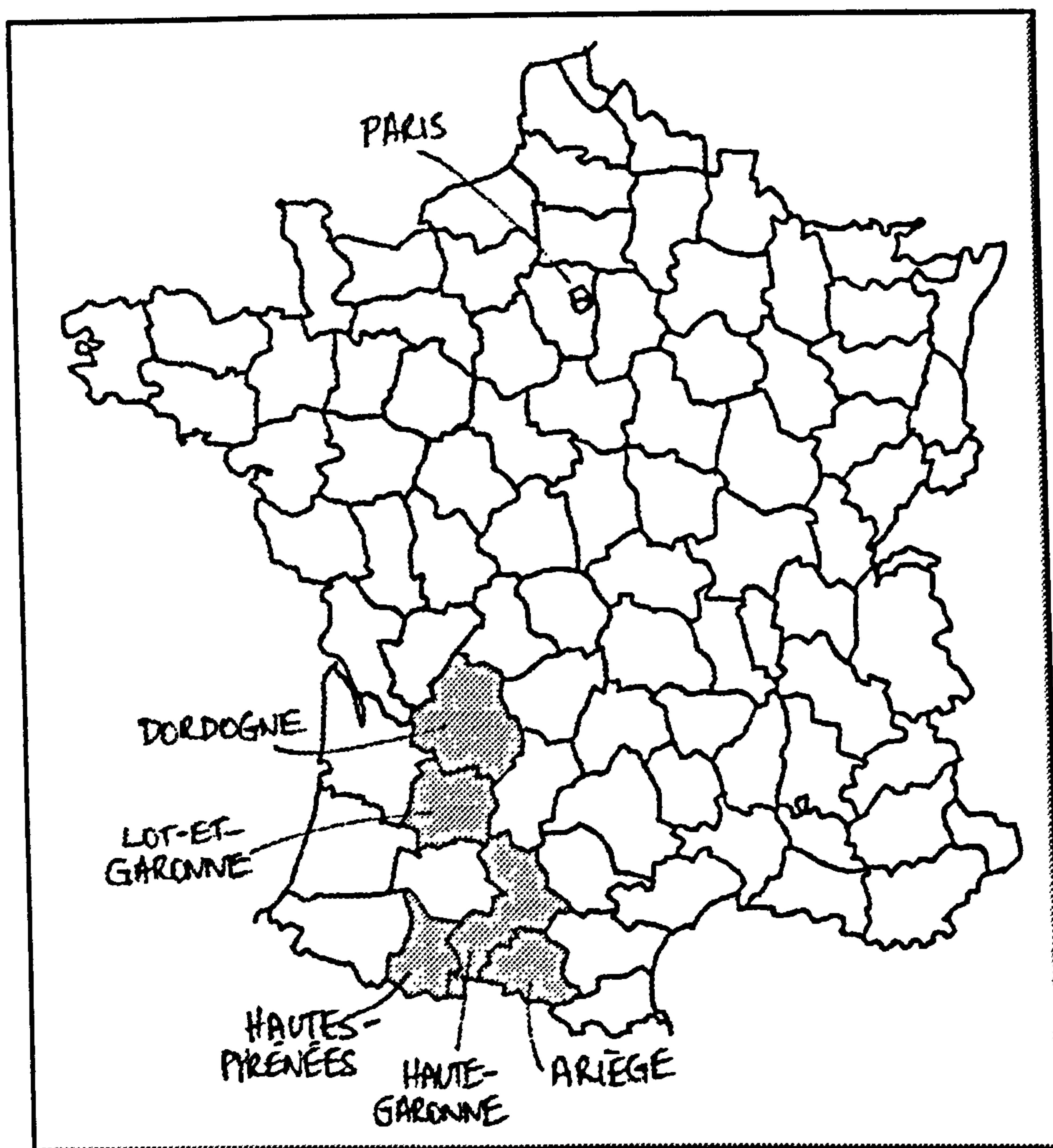
As the evidence will show, there is no doubt that despite the remoteness of south-western villages, both physically and ideologically, from the seat of government, official political information did indeed arrive in the most isolated rural communities. Even under the *ancien régime*, inhabitants of the countryside had received the information they were intended to hear. During the Revolution, the amount of material to be sent out was so great that the problem was not whether material arrived, but that the volume of it threatened to overwhelm the established delivery system, a problem that would largely be counterbalanced by reforms arising from the government's focus on communication. What is equally certain, however, is that official announcements were not the only source of information available in the countryside. The Revolution was imposed upon a society in which oral communication networks already provided a means of gathering news, and these

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<sup>5</sup> Among the numerous regional and local studies, see in particular Alan Forrest, *The Revolution in Provincial France: Aquitaine, 1789-1799* (Oxford, 1996); Anne-Marie Cocula-Vallières, *Un Fleuve et des hommes: Les gens de la Dordogne au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1981); Georges Bussière, *Études historiques sur la Révolution en Périgord* (3 vols., Bordeaux, 1877-1903); and Jean Castarède, *Histoire de la Guyenne et de la Gascogne: le berceau de la France de -400,000 av. J.-C. à l'an 2000* (Paris, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Of the studies of this region, see in particular Michel Chevalier, *La Vie humaine dans les Pyrénées ariégeoises* (Paris, 1956) and Peter Sahlin, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, 1989). This question will be dealt with in more detail in chapter I.

## Map of the Departments of France in 1790



Source: Adapted from: "Les départements, districts et cantons en 1790", carte no.5, Le territoire: Les limites administratives, vol. 5, part 2 of the series, *Atlas de la Révolution française* (Paris: Éditions de l'É.H.É.S.S., 1989), map established by Serge Bonin, after P. Dumez and P.G. Chanlaire, *Atlas national de France, 1790-1793*.

networks continued to function alongside the new system. Once the co-existence of these two communications networks – one elite and written, and the other rural and oral – has been demonstrated, we need to ask how peasants reacted to contrasting and conflicting messages, each of which was couched in a different register of discourse and suggested a different conclusion. As I will argue, rural populations were not subdued and subservient, nor were they ignorant and reactionary, or at least not homogeneously so. The reactions of ordinary farmers and country artisans to both government decrees and political ideas expressed by private individuals, as recorded in local archives, allow us a glimpse into the *mentalité* of rural citizens confronted by the disruption of the Revolution.

### **Government communication, the peasant, and politicisation**

Communication in general, and the communication of political news and ideas in particular, plays a fundamental role in history, touching many avenues of historical enquiry and figuring in countless important historical debates.<sup>7</sup> The fifteenth-century invention of the printing press, for example, has long been hailed as one of the turning points signaling the dawn of the modern era. From diffusing the knowledge of the Italian Renaissance to contributing to rising literacy, from implementing the Protestant Reformation to fostering the spread of modern capitalism, the “Print Revolution” brought about many of the aspects in which modern society differs fundamentally from that of the medieval period.<sup>8</sup> The arrival of the electronic information age and, in particular, the Internet revolution, has been described as a comparable twentieth-century paradigm shift.<sup>9</sup> The all-encompassing significance of these changes in communication reveals that the way in which news and ideas were shared and spread is completely intrinsic to our assessment of our social, political and economic past. Indeed, Canadian media analyst and communications theorist Marshall McLuhan once suggested that communications media are so fundamental to the functioning of society that the only true “revolutions” are revolutions in the means by

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<sup>7</sup> See the recent Longman reader, *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society*, edited by David Crowley and Paul Heyer, for a thorough treatment of key topics in communication history through the ages (New York, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1979), and *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1983); Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of The Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800*, trans. David Gerard (London/New York, 1990); and Walter J. Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca, NY, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context* (Chicago, 1990), and *The Second Media Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995).



which information is communicated.<sup>10</sup>

The first two chapters of this dissertation are concerned with official communication: that is, the way in which news and information sent out by the French government and other official bodies arrived in the countryside. Although there have been many excellent studies of rural France in the eighteenth century and during the Revolution, not many of these specifically address how information circulated: such processes are often taken for granted.<sup>11</sup> The omission is not unique to French history in this period, for while the theme of communication is present in some form in nearly every historian's work, it has been largely neglected as a historical subject in its own right. This lacuna arises in part from the nature of communication itself: omnipresent and all-important, it appears everywhere in the historical record, virtually overwhelming the historian who has been trained to focus on a limited body of source material. As a result, even within the body of scholarship on the history of communication which has accumulated since the 1970s, historians have typically chosen to limit their studies to either a change in communications media or methods – of which the early modern printing revolution constitutes merely the most prominent – or to one medium in a particular context. Of the latter trend, the periodical press has easily received the most attention.<sup>12</sup> Firstly, the press is clearly the

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<sup>10</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto, 1962), and *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York, 1964).

<sup>11</sup> Among the exceptions, please see Melvin Edelstein, *La Feuille Villageoise: Communication et modernisation dans les régions rurales pendant la Révolution* (Paris, 1977), pp. 63-6, 85-8; Cynthia Bouton, *The Flour War: Gender, Class, and Community in Late Ancien Régime French Society* (University Park, PA, 1993), chapter 5; Jean Boutier, *Campagnes en Émoi: Révoltes et Révolution en bas-Limousin, 1789-1800* (Le Loubanel, 1987), pp. 85-91; Clay Ramsay, *The Ideology of the Great Fear: the Soissonais in 1789* (Baltimore, 1992), chapter 4; Philippe Bourdin, *Des lieux, des mots, les Révolutionnaires. Le Puy-de-Dôme entre 1789 et 1799* (Clermont-Ferrand, 1995); and Vivian Gruder, "Can we hear the voices of peasants? France 1788", *History of European Ideas*, 17 (1993), pp. 167-90, and "Political News as Coded Messages: The Parisian and Provincial Press in the Pre-Revolution, 1787-1788", *French History*, 12 (1998), pp. 1-24. Finally, several general and regional studies of rural society have sought to elucidate the processes of communication: Pierre Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730* (Paris, 1960), pp. 85-92; Pierre Rascol, *Les Paysans de l'Albigeois à la fin de l'Ancien Régime* (Aurillac, 1961), pp. 75-83; Jean-Pierre Gutton, *La Sociabilité Villageoise dans l'ancienne France* (Paris, 1979) and Albert Babeau, *Le Village sous l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1878).

<sup>12</sup> Work in press history ranges from studies of specific papers and journalists to the role of the press in particular time frames. For an indication of the breadth of work on the French revolutionary press alone, see Hugh Gough, *The Newspaper Press in the French Revolution* (London, 1988); Robert Darnton and Daniel Roche (eds.), *Revolution in Print: The Press in France, 1775-1800* (Berkeley, CA, 1989); Claude Labrosse and Pierre Rétat, *Naissance du journal révolutionnaire* (Lyon, 1989); Jeremy D. Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789-1799* (Durham, NC, 1990), and "The Press and the French Revolution after Two Hundred Years," *French Historical Studies*, 16 (1990), pp. 664-83; Harvey Chisick (ed.), *The Press in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1991; see bibliography for complete reference); Jeremy Popkin (ed.), *Media and Revolution: Comparative Perspectives* (Lexington, KY, 1995). More broad in scope but deserving of special attention is a recent collection of papers edited by Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows: *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820* (Cambridge, 2002).

most effective communication tool to arise from the invention of printing, and thus patently deserving of study. Moreover, as press historians Jeremy Popkin and Jack Censer point out, newspapers offer rich and easily accessible historical data which are “already structured, at least in part, as historical narratives,”<sup>13</sup> reducing to a manageable level the relevant body of source material. Beyond these two categories of historical enquiry, however, there exist very few overall studies. As press scholar Michael Schudson affirmed in a recent review essay in the *American Historical Review*, “...few historians or political and social theorists have reflected at length on news as an institution.”<sup>14</sup> Although a handful of scholars have taken a speculative step back, to survey the long-term significance of communication, such perspectives tend to be the domain of journalism and communications scholars rather than of historians *per se*, and are aimed predominantly at a popular audience.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, over the last fifteen years, there has been a growing interest in how information was transmitted before the modern era, and in the importance of that transmission to the development of popular political culture. In the field of French history, Michèle Fogel has explored how the French monarchy verbally imparted “correct” news and information to the population in elaborate, rhetorical rituals designed to emphasize royal power.<sup>16</sup> Ten years later, fellow *ancien régime* historian Gilles Feyel published a colossal tome which, while focussing on “la presse d’information” from 1630 to 1788, also reflected upon the nature of official communication in general before the Revolution.<sup>17</sup> Historians of England have a somewhat more established tradition of studying how

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<sup>13</sup> Jeremy Popkin and Jack Censer, “Lessons from a Symposium”, in Popkin (ed.), *Media and Revolution*, pp. 1-11; citation pp. 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Schudson, “News, Public, Nation” (review article), *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), pp. 481-95; citation p. 481.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Mitchell Stephens, *A History of News: From the Drum to the Satellite* (New York, 1988), and Dagmar Lorenz, “How the World Became Smaller”, *History Today*, 46:11 (Nov. 1996), pp. 45-50. For an exception to this rule, however, see Umberto Eco’s esoteric and highly abstract paper, “Openness, Information, Communication”, in *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), pp.44-83.

<sup>16</sup> Michèle Fogel, *Les cérémonies de l’information dans la France du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> Gilles Feyel, *L’Annonce et la nouvelle: La Presse d’information en France sous l’Ancien Régime, 1630-1788* (Oxford, 1998).



information circulated in the early modern period,<sup>18</sup> as do historians of the New World.<sup>19</sup> Finally, Sian Lewis, a scholar of ancient Greece, has produced an original monograph involving similar themes in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., demonstrating the universal appeal of the topic.<sup>20</sup> The recent proliferation of Ph.D. theses addressing questions of communication<sup>21</sup> and conferences proposed in seemingly far-flung fields<sup>22</sup> have together borne testimony to the expansion of the theme in current historical research. Indeed, by the time Robert Darnton issued the inspiring call in his 1999 American Historical Association presidential address for more study of “how societies made sense of events and transmitted information about them”, the effort was already well underway.<sup>23</sup>

The question of communication is particularly important in the field of French revolutionary studies, for it holds one of the keys in the long-standing controversy over the exact time and nature of the politicisation of the peasantry. Since the emancipation of rural history from the rigid structures of the Marxist interpretations of the 1960s and 1970s, historians have been led by both the French *Annalistes* tradition and the general trend of the “new social history” to emphasize the social diversity within the rural community. This focus, in turn, has given us a tremendous breadth of research on the Revolution in rural

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<sup>18</sup> F.J. Levy, “How Information Spread among the Gentry, 1550-1640”, *Journal of British Studies*, 21 (1982), pp. 11-34; Richard Cust, “News and Politics in Early Seventeenth-Century England”, *Past and Present*, 112 (1986), pp. 60-90; C. John Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England: Cultural Dynamics of Daily Information* (New York, 1996); Adam Fox, “Rumour, News and Popular Political Opinion in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England”, *The Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), pp. 597-620; and Ian Atherton, “The Itch Grown a Disease: Manuscript Transmission of News in the Seventeenth Century”, *Prose Studies*, 21 (1998), pp. 39-65.

<sup>19</sup> Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (New York, 1989); Rebecca Earle, “Information and Disinformation in Late Colonial New Granada”, *The Americas*, 54 (1997), pp. 167-84.

<sup>20</sup> Sian Lewis, *News and Society in the Greek Polis* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> To cite just a few, see Paul Cohen, “Courtly French, Learned Latin, and Peasant Patois: The Making of a National Language in Early Modern France,” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2001; G. Charles Walton, “Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution, 1789-1795”, Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2002; and Allyson F. Creasman, “Policing the Word: The Control of Print and Public Expression in Early Modern Augsburg, 1520-1648”, Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Consider, for example, the 1993 conference of the *Société des historiens médiévistes de l'enseignement supérieur*, the proceedings of which have been published as *La Circulation des nouvelles au moyen âge: XXIV<sup>e</sup> Congrès de la S.H.M.E.S., Avignon, juin 1993* (Rome/Paris, 1994), as well as the 24<sup>th</sup> Irish Conference of Historians, held in Cork from 20-22 May 1999, at which scholars working on diverse periods were invited to reflect upon “information, media and power throughout the ages”, with some of the key contributions addressing questions of oral versus print culture, images as propaganda, and the role of government in disseminating and controlling information. Most recently, medieval scholars in the Canadian cities of Montreal and Ottawa organised a colloquium in May 2002 entitled “Informer: Institutions et communication,” in which communicants presented research on the oral publication of information, the relationships between orality and literacy, the language of official communication, and on the very notion of “information” in the late medieval period.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Darnton, “An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris”, *American Historical Review* 105 (2000), pp. 1-35.

France, as historians attempt to elucidate the underlying factors and motivations which determined the particular reactions of rural communities. Apart from Georges Lefebvre's ground-breaking work on the department of the Nord,<sup>24</sup> Paul Bois was one of the first to attempt such a project.<sup>25</sup> In his work on the Sarthe, Bois identified the manner of land ownership to be the decisive factor in establishing social, and hence political, relations. In the west of the department, where the peasants were better off, rural communities had little contact with urban revolutionary culture, whereas in the poorer districts to the east, uneven soil quality forced peasants to supplement their agricultural income with cottage industry work, thus creating a natural conduit for ideas and pro-revolutionary sentiment.

Many historians since Bois have undertaken similar regional studies, with the intention of portraying the particular factors which determined local rural responses to the Revolution. Colin Lucas, working on the imposition of the Terror in the department of the Loire, highlighted the role of complex social and economic circumstances in the polarisation of the countryside.<sup>26</sup> Jean-Pierre Jessenne, in his study of Artois from 1760 to 1848, found that the peasants' response to political events depended upon the relationship of the local rural elite to outside powers.<sup>27</sup> Guy Lemarchand followed Marxist tradition in insisting upon the transition from feudalism to capitalism in the *pays de Caux* (part of modern-day Seine-Maritime). However, he stressed that while rural conflict was deeply entrenched in local power struggles, lessons learned from national political developments allowed rural citizens to place their experiences in a political framework.<sup>28</sup> Finally, a group of North American social historians, including Charles Tilly, Donald Sutherland, Timothy Tackett, and T.J.A. Le Goff, have greatly increased our understanding of the various factors – social, economic, and cultural – which determined the variety of rural response

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<sup>24</sup> Georges Lefebvre, *Paysans du Nord pendant la Révolution française* (Bari, 1959), see also his essay, "La Révolution française et les paysans", in *Études sur la Révolution française* (Paris, 1963), pp. 338-67. Lefebvre is generally accredited with having brought the rural classes out of historical oblivion and onto centre stage, although his perspective remains a Marxist one, with the "fourth estate" having engineered an "autonomous peasant revolution". For other Marxist interpretations of the role of the peasantry in the French Revolution, see Albert Soboul, *Problèmes paysannes de la Révolution, 1789-1848* (Paris, 1982); Florence Gauthier, *Voie paysanne dans la Révolution française: l'exemple de la Picardie* (Paris, 1977); Guy Ikni, "Crise agraire et révolution paysanne. Le mouvement populaire dans les campagnes de l'Oise de la décennie physiocratique à l'an II", Unpublished *Doctorat d'état*, Université de Paris I, 1993; and most recently, Anatolii Ado, *Paysans en Révolution: Terre, pouvoir et jacquerie, 1789-1794*, trans. Serge Aberdam and Marcel Dorigny (Paris, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Paul Bois, *Paysans de l'Ouest: des structures économiques et sociales aux options politiques depuis l'époque révolutionnaire dans la Sarthe* (Le Mans, 1960).

<sup>26</sup> Colin Lucas, *The Structure of the Terror: The Example of Javogues and the Loire* (Oxford, 1973).

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Pierre Jessenne, *Pouvoir au village et Révolution: Artois, 1760-1848* (Lille, 1987).

<sup>28</sup> Guy Lemarchand, *La fin du féodalisme dans le pays de Caux: conjoncture économique et démographique et structure sociale dans une région de grande culture de la crise du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle à la stabilisation de la Révolution, 1640-1795* (Paris, 1989).



to the Revolution in western France.<sup>29</sup>

However, the majority of these scholars have been reluctant to argue that the peasantry in their region of study played a conscious political role in the Revolution. The question of rural "politicisation" first surfaced in response to the publication of Eugen Weber's controversial monograph, *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*.<sup>30</sup> In this treatise and in two subsequent articles,<sup>31</sup> Weber maintained that until the Third Republic, economic and cultural isolation prevented peasants from becoming involved in politics; it was only the advent of railways, universal conscription, and improvements in education which integrated rural France, connecting it physically, linguistically, and ideologically to the nation. The criticism of Weber's work was connected, in part, to certain weaknesses in his research. The sources for *Peasants into Frenchmen* were biased towards judgements and descriptions of rural culture and tradition, most commonly penned by outsiders; furthermore, Weber neglected other important issues, such as income, literacy, mobility, industrial production, and political activity, which would have served to balance his picture.<sup>32</sup> So grave were the omissions, in fact, that Peter McPhee once cited *Peasants into Frenchmen* as "a glaring example of how an uncritical and unselective use of urban descriptions of the countryside can result in fundamental misunderstanding."<sup>33</sup>

However, the longevity of the debate over Weber's hypothesis stems primarily from differences in opinion in both the definition of "politicisation" and in the criteria used to define it.<sup>34</sup> Those who claim that the turning point came around the 1848 Revolution,

<sup>29</sup>To cite only one work by each author: Charles Tilly, *The Vendée* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964); Donald Sutherland, *The Chouans: The Social Origins of Popular Counter-Revolution in Upper Brittany, 1770-1796* (Oxford, 1982); Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton, 1986); T.J.A. Le Goff, *Vannes and its Region: A Study of Town and Country in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 1981).

<sup>30</sup> (Stanford, CA, 1976). For an overview of the debate, see Edward Berenson, "Politics and the French Peasantry: the debate continues", *Social History*, 12 (1987), p. 213-29, and Melvin Edelstein, "La Place de la Révolution française dans la politisation des paysans", *A.h.R.f.*, 62 (1990), p. 135-49.

<sup>31</sup> "The Second Republic, Politics and the Peasant", *French Historical Studies*, 11 (1980), pp. 521-50, and "Comment la politique vint aux paysans: A Second Look at Peasant Politicization", *American Historical Review*, 87 (1982), pp. 357-89.

<sup>32</sup> This point was made by Charles Tilly, in "Did the Cake of Custom Break?", in John Merriman (ed.), *Consciousness and Class Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York, 1979), pp. 17-44; see esp. pp. 17-9.

<sup>33</sup> Peter McPhee, "Historians, Germs and Culture-Brokers: the Circulation of Ideas in the Nineteenth-Century Countryside", *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 23 (1986), pp. 115-29, citation p.123. See also Ted Margadant, "French Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century: A Review Essay", *Agricultural History*, 53 (1979), pp.644-51.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Berenson, for example, points out that each school of thought uses "different criteria for identifying politicisation, without making those differences explicit" (Berenson, "Politics and the French Peasantry, p. 226). Melvin Edelstein echos this point, insisting that we decide "ce que l'on entend par 'politique'" (Edelstein, "La Place", p. 136).

including Maurice Agulhon, Ted Margadant, John Merriman, and Peter McPhee, have defined politicisation as a definite *prise de position*, but usually in the sense of a commitment to the political left.<sup>35</sup> Peter Jones, who is nearly alone in supporting Weber's Third Republic hypothesis, is at any rate more likely to refer to the political *integration* of isolated rural communities, rather than their awareness of politics.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, those scholars who study the introduction of politics into rural communities during the Revolution and early nineteenth century are more likely to emphasize the significance of any rural participation, rather than its underdevelopment in comparison with later periods or, indeed, with contemporary urban political participation.<sup>37</sup> Charles Tilly, for example, has criticised Weber's evaluation of electoral results: according to his research, the high levels of participation so valued by Weber in the Third Republic had already been reached in 1792,<sup>38</sup> an attestation which has been confirmed by Malcolm Crook and Melvin Edelstein.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps the most contentious issue is that of whether the political participation has to be at the "national" level to qualify, or if involvement in "local" politics, such as electing municipal officials and deciding questions of local significance, can be considered political involvement. In general, it is those historians who work at the regional level, and who thus come to understand the internal functioning of rural communities, who support the latter

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<sup>35</sup> Maurice Agulhon, *La République au village: les populations du Var de la Révolution à la Deuxième République* (Paris, 1979); Ted Margadant, *French Peasants in Revolt: The Insurrection of 1851* (Princeton, 1979); John Merriman, *The Agony of the Republic: The Repression of the Left in Revolutionary France, 1848-1851* (New Haven/London, 1978), and "Tradition and Modernity in Rural France during the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Modern History*, 56 (1984), pp. 667-97; and Peter McPhee, *The Politics of Rural Life: Political Mobilization in the French Countryside, 1846-1852* (Oxford, 1992).

<sup>36</sup> In his research on the southern Massif Central, Jones argues that the isolated, traditional, and desperately poor mountainous departments of the Ardèche, Aveyron, Lozère, and Haute-Loire were only truly integrated by government intervention around 1880. However, Jones does stress the unique characteristics of the region, whereas Weber purports to speak for all of France. *Politics and Rural Society: The Southern Massif Central, c.1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1985).

<sup>37</sup> For an overall view of rural participation in political societies, see Philippe Boutry and Jean Boutier, *Les Sociétés politiques*, vol. 6 of the series, *Atlas de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1992), pp. 36-7, 58-67. Michel Vovelle was one of the first to link political sociability to rural politicisation; see "Formes de politisation de la société rurale en Provence sous la Révolution française: Entre Jacobinisme et Contre-Révolution au village", *Annales de Bretagne*, 89 (1982), pp. 185-204.

<sup>38</sup> Tilly, "Did the Cake of Custom Break?", p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Among the many publications of these two authors, please see Malcolm Crook, "Aux urnes, citoyens! Urban and rural electoral behaviour during the French Revolution", in Alan Forrest and Peter Jones (eds.), *Reshaping France: Town, Country and Region during the French Revolution* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 152-67, and *Elections in the French Revolution: an apprenticeship in democracy, 1789-1799* (Cambridge, 1996); Melvin Edelstein, "L'apprentissage de la citoyenneté: Participation électorale des campagnards et citadins (1789-1793)", dans *L'Image de la Révolution française: Communications présentées lors du Congrès Mondial pour le Bicentenaire de la Révolution* (Paris, 1989), pp. 15-25; and "Le comportement électoral sous la Monarchie constitutionnelle (1790-1791). Une interprétation communautaire", *A.h.R.f.*, 67 (1995), pp. 361-83.



point of view, while the distinction is used as a criterion and even as an attack by those who support the nineteenth-century conclusion.<sup>40</sup> Weber described the shift from "local" politics to "national" politics as a change brought about by the gradual integration of rural France into a modern, market- and communications-oriented nation. However, he failed to take note of the tremendous social diversity of rural society in the nineteenth century, and even before the Revolution, in the end creating a false juxtaposition of an urbanised, French-speaking, market-oriented France with a backward, isolated France.<sup>41</sup> Jean-Pierre Jessenne, in contrast, while admitting that peasants in Artois did not take much interest in problems of national significance, points out that they were very much attached to their structures of communal government and their right to choose their own administrators.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Georges Fournier has shown that the *ancien régime* tradition of democratic municipal councils greatly aided rural communities in adjusting to and participating in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary order; in fact, he finds a remarkable continuity among local political personnel throughout the entire era.<sup>43</sup> In the context of the revolutionary period, with its intense propaganda, it would seem unwise to argue that rural communities who *did* participate in politics could have done so without being aware of the national scope of the issues involved. As Peter Jones has reflected:

The limitations upon peasant political awareness have been compared to the plight of a man trying to survey the sky while imprisoned at the bottom of a well. Yet seismic events of the magnitude of the revolution could push back the sides of the well: squabbles over pews become part of a nation-wide campaign of anti-seigneurialism; on-going quarrels over the commons acquire strange new ideological reference points.<sup>44</sup>

Peter McPhee also argues convincingly that it is only natural that rural political choice should be a result of local struggles over power and wealth, and Jeff Horn, in his critique of Patrice Gueniffey's treatise on elections, has remarked that local participation is

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<sup>40</sup> Evidence such as that presented by Paul Bois in *Paysans de l'Ouest*, where peasants turned out in greater numbers for elections of "local" significance than for those of "national" significance, has been cited numerous times. However, other regions have supplied evidence to the contrary which is equally convincing, and Bois' definition of "local" elections has been criticised; Jean-Louis Ormières, in his article, "Politique et religion dans l'Ouest", points out that in 1791, the principal "national" election to which Bois refers, peasants were in fact also choosing local administrators (*Annales E.S.C.*, 40 (1985), pp. 1041-66).

<sup>41</sup> For an interesting argument regarding the dichotomy of 'traditional' vs. 'modern', see Eric Hobsbawm, "Peasants and Politics", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1 (1973), pp. 3-22.

<sup>42</sup> Jessenne, *Pouvoir au village*, p. 247; see also his paper, "Continuités et ruptures dans la détention des fonctions locales en Artois (1789-1800)", dans *La Révolution française et le monde rural: Actes du Colloque tenu en Sorbonne les 23, 24, et 25 octobre 1987* (Paris, 1989), pp.397-412; see esp. p. 400.

<sup>43</sup> Georges Fournier, "Les municipalités languedociennes à l'épreuve de la Révolution (1780- 1800)", in Roger Dupuy, ed., *Pouvoir local et Révolution, 1780-1850: La Frontière intérieure: colloque de Rennes* (Rennes, 1995), pp. 519-36; and *Démocratie et vie municipale en Languedoc du milieu du XVIII<sup>e</sup> au début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (2 vols., Toulouse, 1994).

<sup>44</sup> Jones, *Peasantry*, p. 208.



perhaps even more significant, in terms of political awareness, than participation in elections for national representatives.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, historians have located the politicisation of rural areas at a number of different temporal points over more than a century, from the Revolution of 1789, or even before,<sup>46</sup> to the 1870s or even 1880s. In the chapters which follow, I argue in favour of a model of politicisation which places the *prise de conscience* of the peasantry at the French Revolution. Politicisation, I submit, should be defined in terms of *awareness* of national politics, rather than participation in any given political manifestation; one can be aware of political issues and simply choose not to participate, as indeed a significant proportion of people do today. Moreover, while literacy, the standardization of language, and the availability of print information are certainly important factors in promoting political awareness and involvement, it would nevertheless be an anachronistic use of the terms “information”, “awareness” or “integrated” to assume that political consciousness must come from written media. As John Merriman has pointed out, the use of local dialects did not prevent peasants from participating in national politics throughout the nineteenth century, nor has it prevented them since 1870; in 1917, the *Midi* complained about “Paris’ war”, and Edgar Morin has cited the 1960s as the turning point in Breton-speaking Finistère.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, peasants were aware of political happenings outside their immediate region: the evidence of official political texts arriving in south-western villages by the bundle will leave little doubt as to whether or not those villages were isolated from the current of politics. Moreover, their statements, as recorded in the police and judicial files of the Revolution, will conclusively demonstrate that they held clearly defined opinions on matters of political importance. In my view, the key to the puzzle of isolating the “politicisation” of the peasantry lies in the communication of political ideas and information in the countryside during the French Revolution.

### Political culture, the public sphere and popular opinion

In revolutionary historiography, the recognition of political communication as a

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<sup>45</sup> Jeff Horn, “Toute politique est locale: une relecture critique de *Le Nombre et la Raison: la Révolution française et les élections* de Patrice Gueniffey”, *A.h.R.f.*, 70 (1998), pp. 89-109.

<sup>46</sup> Some historians of rural revolts of the early modern period and the eighteenth century have described peasants’ actions as political. See in particular Yves-Marie Bercé, *Croquants et nu-pieds: Les soulèvements paysans en France du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1974); Louise Tilly, “The Food Riot as a Form of Political Conflict in France”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2 (1971), pp. 23-57; and Jean Nicolas, *La Rébellion française: Mouvements populaires et conscience sociale, 1661-1789* (Paris, 2002), pp.281-9.

<sup>47</sup> John Merriman, review of *Peasants into Frenchmen*, in *Journal of Modern History*, 50 (1978), pp. 534-6.

significant topic in its own right is a relatively recent development. In the study of eighteenth-century France and the French Revolution, the recognition of the importance of communication in its own right is a relatively recent development. While the true pioneer in this regard was Daniel Mornet, who first laid out the ideological “causes” of the French Revolution, Mornet’s analysis ended in 1787: as far as he was concerned, the events of the revolutionary decade remained social and political in nature.<sup>48</sup> It was François Furet who would challenge both the traditional Marxist and Revisionist positions with respect to the “meaning” of the French Revolution itself.<sup>49</sup> Furet proposed that the key to understanding the French Revolution was not social groups, but ideas. The real actors in the revolutionary crisis were words: as Jeremy Popkin recently explained, “the revolution was a conflict of discourses, a struggle for the control of the meaning to be assigned to key phrases.”<sup>50</sup> Furet, among others, would continue to argue for the importance of the cultural – including ideas, symbols, and words – in the revolutionary crisis, thus according considerable importance to communication.

Although Furet’s conception of the cultural history of the Revolution was not devoid of antecedents, his formulation of it in 1978 instigated two major shifts in French revolutionary historiography. The first of these was a greater interest in how the publication and the circulation of ideas undermined *ancien régime* society and affected the course of the Revolution. Some of the groundwork for this type of enquiry had already been laid by Robert Darnton in his study of the publication of the *Encyclopédie*, the multi-volume compilation of knowledge which in many ways epitomised the Enlightenment itself, and in his early work on the intersections between “high” and “low” literature in the eighteenth century.<sup>51</sup> More recently, research in this field has focussed upon the relationship between print culture and public opinion, and ultimately, between ideas and

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<sup>48</sup> Mornet, *Les Origines intellectuelles de la Révolution française, 1715-1787* (Paris, 1933).

<sup>49</sup> Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge/Paris, 1981). The Marxist-Revisionist debate, while not specifically relevant here, is nevertheless essential background reading for an understanding of the French Revolution. For a recent summary of the Marxist position, see Albert Soboul, *Comprendre la Révolution: Problèmes politiques de la Révolution française, 1789-1797* (Paris, 1981); for the classic revisionist position, see Alfred Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1964). For attempts to sort out the two, see Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1984), pp. 1-16; Colin Lucas, “Nobles, Bourgeois and the Origins of the French Revolution”, *Past and Present*, 60 (1973), pp. 84-126.

<sup>50</sup> Popkin, “Media and Revolutionary Crises”, in Popkin and Censer (eds.), *Media and Revolution*, p. 18-19.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775-1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979); “Reading, Writing, and Publishing in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Daedalus*, 100 (1971), pp. 214-56; “In Search of the Enlightenment: Recent Attempts to Create a Social History of Ideas”, *Journal of Modern History*, 43 (1971), pp. 113-32; and “The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature in Prerevolutionary France”, *Past and Present*, 51 (1971), pp. 81-115.



the Revolution. Roger Chartier's provocative essay, entitled "Do Books Make Revolutions?", is illustrative of this trend.<sup>52</sup> Although Chartier ultimately provided a nuanced answer to his own question, the theme would resurface frequently in subsequent revolutionary historiography. Chartier would later co-edit with Daniel Roche the proceedings of a conference dedicated to the interrelationships between critical literature and political revolution;<sup>53</sup> and Robert Darnton's subsequent research showed a greater interest in causation, revealing that collective opinion prior to the Revolution had been undermined by the critical writings of eighteenth-century hacks and by the efforts of the police to control the spread of their ideas.<sup>54</sup> The purely linguistic aspects of Furet's contribution to revolutionary historiography would also find an echo in the literature, in such diverse works as the theoretical, abstract writings of Keith Michael Baker and the more concrete, analytical research of Jacques Guilhaumou.<sup>55</sup>

The second tendency in the cultural history of the Revolution to have arisen since Furet's critical essay is the development of "political culture" as an analytical concept and as a subject of study. Lynn Hunt was one of the first, in her defining work *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, to enunciate the term.<sup>56</sup> Hunt sought to "rehabilitate the politics of revolution" by uncovering "the rules of political behaviour". Political culture, as formulated in her work, was made up of symbolic practices; "the differences in reception of the new practices", according to her, "had their impact on the way revolutionary politics worked, and especially on its successes and failures."<sup>57</sup> Indeed, while Furet had rejected the social explanations of both Marxists and Revisionists in favour of ideology, he had, in fact, resuscitated political history from the depths of disdain into which it had fallen. Political history would no longer be a dry narrative of governmental administration and the feats of great men, but rather, of the practices, discourse and experiences constituting the culture of politics experienced by the people. Since Hunt's initial formulation, the theme has become a leitmotiv in French revolutionary

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<sup>52</sup> Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham/London, 1991), chapter 4, pp. 67-91.

<sup>53</sup> Roger Chartier, Daniel Roche, et al. (eds.), *Livre et révolution: colloque organisée par l'Institut d'histoire moderne et contemporaine (CNRS), 20-22 mai 1987* (Paris, 1988).

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, "Philosophy under the Cloak", in Darnton and Roche (eds.), *Revolution in Print*, pp. 27-49, and *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982).

<sup>55</sup> Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990); Michel Glatigny and Jacques Guilhaumou (eds.), *Peuple et pouvoir: études de lexicologie politique* (Lille, 1981); and Guilhaumou, *La langue politique et la Révolution française: de l'événement à la raison linguistique* (Paris, 1989).

<sup>56</sup> Hunt, *Politics*.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10, 13.

historiography, with historians exploring such varied topics as political sociability, symbolism and visual pageantry, as well as the participation of the population in regular manifestations of the Republic.<sup>58</sup> Emmet Kennedy brought many of these aspects together in his study, *Cultural History of the French Revolution*, and it is notable that his work allocates considerable space to the fundamental theme of communication.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, the political history of the Revolution has been expanded and enriched to the point that popular political practice, political discourse, and communication of political ideas through symbolism and imagery all figure among current research subjects in the field. However, before we take political culture and communication into the countryside, there remains one essential link to be drawn between these themes and the implications of the conversation between Marie Bordet and the beggar Chaussonnel, whom we met at the beginning. This link is the concept of "public opinion", and it draws upon the work of German social theorist Jürgen Habermas, whose *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* was translated into French in 1979 and into English, in 1989, as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.<sup>60</sup> Habermas argued that one of the defining characteristics of *ancien régime* society had been the formation of a bourgeois "public sphere", an enlightened forum which was both physical – as salons, learned institutions and philosophical societies became places of discussion – and abstract, establishing in France by the mid-eighteenth century a tribunal of "public opinion" which was capable of passing judgement on public policy and thus, of presenting a challenge to the government.<sup>61</sup> The participants in the public sphere were the literate, reasoning sons and daughters of the Enlightenment, who expressed their opinions in letters, novels, journals and newspapers. However, constrained by class divisions, censorship, and by a lack of opportunity for political participation, it was only at the time of the Revolution that this literary public sphere moved into the realm of effectual political criticism.<sup>62</sup> As Craig Calhoun has pointed out, Habermas' thesis is significant because it is an inquiry "at once

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<sup>58</sup> To name just a few examples, see Mona Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire, 1789-1799* (Paris, 1976); Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au combat: l'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1789 à 1880* (New York/Paris, 1979); and Serge Bianchi, *La Révolution culturelle de l'an II: Élitisme et peuple, 1789-1799* (Paris, 1982).

<sup>59</sup> (New Haven/London, 1989). See in particular chapter X ("Communicating") and chapter XI ("Educating").

<sup>60</sup> (Neuwied, 1962); French translation by Marc de Launay, *L'Espace public: Archéologie de la publicité comme dimension de la société bourgeoise* (Paris, 1978); English translation by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that in addition to France, Habermas also used his model to describe England and Germany, with slight variations regarding the timing of the development of the public sphere.

<sup>62</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 67-71.



into normative ideals and actual history.”<sup>63</sup>

The fact that these principles might be gainfully applied to the study of political culture in the eighteenth century and the French Revolution is readily apparent, and indeed, much of the work on the political and cultural history of this period makes explicit reference to Habermas’ work.<sup>64</sup> However, while the concept of the “public sphere” has been shown to be both stimulating and useful in the interpretation of the culture of the elite in the eighteenth century, historians are increasingly questioning the narrow parameters that define it. Their first objection stems from the fact that Habermas’ *Öffentlichkeit* is limited to the upper-middle classes: “the *plebeian* public sphere” was intentionally left aside “as a variant that in a sense was suppressed in the historical process”.<sup>65</sup> That the popular public sphere was suppressed is a fair assessment: as Robert Darnton has pointed out, “the eighteenth-century French ‘public’ did not exist in any coherent form; and insofar as it did exist, it was excluded from direct participation in politics.”<sup>66</sup> Yet, of course, it did exist: French subjects were no more oblivious to or mute on their political situation than people had ever been, in any historical context. Arlette Farge, in her ground-breaking study of popular political opinion among the Parisian lower classes in the mid-eighteenth century, declares that her research was inspired by Habermas’ very denial of the importance of that “plebeian” political opinion.<sup>67</sup> Farge’s work draws upon a rich body of source material: the reports of police spies sent into cafés, squares, and other public spaces in eighteenth-century Paris to eavesdrop on conversations and report upon the political opinions of ordinary people. If these people’s opinions, Farge argues, did not constitute a potential threat to the king – the condition stipulated by Habermas for inclusion in the public sphere – then why were the Paris police directed to monitor them?<sup>68</sup> Lisa Jane Graham, who has offered a stimulating second reading of the same police

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<sup>63</sup> Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, the contributions of Keith Michael Baker, “Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France: Variations on a Theme by Habermas”, in Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas*, pp.181-211; Sara Maza, “Le tribunal de la nation: les mémoires judiciaires et l’opinion publique à la fin de l’Ancien Régime”, *Annales: E.S.C.*, 42 (1987), pp. 73-90; Mona Ozouf, “‘Public Opinion’ at the End of the Old Regime”, *Journal of Modern History*, 60 supp. (1988), pp. S1-S21; and Chartier, *Cultural Origins*, especially chapter 2, “The Public Sphere and Public Opinion”. See also the two recent review articles devoted to the subject: Benajmin Nathans, “Habermas’s ‘Public Sphere’ in the Era of the French Revolution”, *French Historical Studies*, 16 (1990), pp. 620-44, and Jon Cowans, “Habermas and French History: The Public Sphere and the Problem of Political Legitimacy”, *French History*, 13 (1999), pp. 134-60.

<sup>65</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. xviii.

<sup>66</sup> Darnton, *Literary Underground*, p. 33.

<sup>67</sup> Arlette Farge, *Subversive Words: Public Opinion in Eighteenth-Century France*, trans. Rosemary Morris, (Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.



sources, has also pointed out the “blind spots” in Habermas’ theory:

...the majority of the research [Habermas] has inspired has been limited in sociological terms to individuals who met the criteria of literacy, leisure, and material comfort. Yet, if one seeks to demonstrate a connection between Enlightenment practice and political revolution, a broader social sampling is certainly required. Is there evidence, for example, of growing critical detachment or heightened subjectivity among individuals who fell outside the bourgeois public sphere of the salons and the academies?<sup>69</sup>

Both Farge and Graham succeed brilliantly in proving that Habermas’ social delimitations of the public sphere are artificial, by revealing a thoughtful, vocal, and, ultimately, powerful voice among the urban lower classes. As Jeffrey Merrick remarked in his review of Graham’s book, “public opinion was not just a concept manipulated by elites for their own purposes but a reality lived in the streets and feared by the authorities.”<sup>70</sup>

The objections to the limitations of Habermasian theory have not, however, been confined to the question of which social classes constitute the public sphere: both the time and the place of the development of “public opinion” are also keenly debated. Indeed, historians are starting to use the concept to describe periods and circumstances further and further removed from the context discussed by Habermas. Sociologist and medieval historian James Given recently described how in the late thirteenth century, a group of men from the south-western towns of Albi and Carcassonne successfully mobilised “public opinion” in opposition to the inquisitors and the bishop,<sup>71</sup> and Bernard Guenée, respected *doyen* of the É.H.É.S.S., has argued for the existence of “public opinion” in the fourteenth century:

Le mot opinion, lui, est bien connu du moyen âge et des temps modernes. Mais il reste pendant longtemps l’opinion “de quelqu’un”. C’est simplement au milieu du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle qu’on commence à parler de l’opinion du public, puis, bientôt après, de l’opinion publique. [...] Est-ce à dire que les réalités qu’ils désignent sont nées, elles aussi, au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle? Certains historiens modernistes le pensent. Selon eux, l’opinion publique est née au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, avec les cafés. Il est pourtant clair que, dès avant le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans les rues et aux carrefours des villes et des villages, les gens ne se privaient pas d’exprimer, parfois avec véhémence, leurs sentiments. Quels que soient les mots, propagande et opinion publique sont deux réalités bien antérieures au Siècle des Lumières.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Lisa Jane Graham, *If the King Only Knew: Seditious Speech in the Reign of Louis XV* (Charlottesville/London, 2000).

<sup>70</sup> Jeffrey Merrick, review of Lisa Jane Graham, “If the King Only Knew”, *Journal of Modern History*, 74 (2002), pp. 169-70.

<sup>71</sup> James B. Given, “The Struggle for Ideological Hegemony in Medieval Languedoc: Heretics and Inquisitors”, paper given at the 48<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the S.F.H.S., Toronto. 11-13 April 2002; text obtained by personal communication with the author and cited with permission.

<sup>72</sup> Bernard Guenée, “La naissance de l’opinion publique en France au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle”, paper given at the 48<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the S.F.H.S., Toronto. 11-13 April 2002; text obtained by personal communication with the author and cited with permission. It is worth noting that Mona Ozouf, while not actually addressing the question of when the reality of public opinion came into being, cautions against the anachronistic use of the



Guenée roots these linguistic musings in an argument concerning the history of the early monarchy, presenting a convincing case of the effect of popular political sentiment on the financial policies of Philip IV after which, he contends, public opinion became “un des grands acteurs de la vie politique du royaume”. Long before 1789, it would appear, sovereigns keenly felt the pressure of their subjects’ assessment.

In addition to stretching the timeframe of the emergence of “public opinion” far earlier than Habermas himself had ever imagined, historians such as Farge and Guenée have argued against Habermas’ contention that the preferred medium of communication in the public sphere – indeed, one of the preconditions for its existence – was print culture. On the one hand, it seems that scholars are simply liberating the phrase “public opinion” from the abstract sense given to it by Habermas, and using it to mean, as we might mean today, simply “what people think”. Michèle Fogel took the matter one step further when she asked the question: “Pourquoi ‘enfermer les choses dans la muraille des mots’, alors que les gouvernants sentent toujours la pression de ce qui, avant de se formuler comme opinion, court toujours comme la *rumeur*?”<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, as Guenée has demonstrated, the orally expressed “public opinion” discovered before 1750 did exert a coercive influence on state policy.<sup>74</sup> While Harold Mah has recently objected that historians have “overspatialized” Habermas’ public sphere – tying it too closely to specific social groups and historical contexts, and losing sight of its essence as an abstract tribunal of opinion which transcended social boundaries to make public judgements<sup>75</sup> – I would argue that the tribunal has not been lost. Indeed, in stretching the social and temporal limitations of the concept, historians have given themselves the latitude to grapple with the development of criticism from the public sphere in eras and circumstances where none was previously detected.

The evidence presented in the chapters that follow will demonstrate conclusively that just as Habermas’ model is useful for the literate urban elite, there is a parallel

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words themselves; before the mid-1700s, “public” was not the opposite of “privé” but rather of “particulier”, and “opinion” implied a type of partisanship or “préjugé”, thus making “public opinion” something of an oxymoron. See Ozouf, “Public Opinion”, p. S1-S2.

<sup>73</sup> Fogel, *Les Cérémonies*, pp. 11-2. The source of the internal quote is Guenée himself, who used the phrase while intervening at the 1984 *Colloque de Rome*; see *Ibid.*, n.6, p. 463, and Fogel, “Propagande, communication, publication: Points de vue et demande d’enquête pour la France des XVI<sup>e</sup>-XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles”, in *Culture et idéologie dans la genèse de l’État moderne: actes de la table ronde organisée par le C.N.R.S. et l’École française de Rome, 15-17 octobre 1984* (Rome, 1985), pp. 325-36.

<sup>74</sup> Bernard Guenée, *L’Opinion publique à la fin du moyen âge, d’après la Chronique de Charles VI du Religieux de Saint-Denis* (Paris, 2002).

<sup>75</sup> Harold Mah, “Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians”, *Journal of Modern History*, 72 (2000), pp. 153-82.



argument to be made regarding the existence of public opinion in rural France, just as historians Arlette Farge, Robert Darnton and Lisa Jane Graham have argued that it existed among the Parisian lower classes. At a time when the overwhelming majority of the population was illiterate, oral communication was the standard method for transmitting ideas and information. Indeed, early modern historian Denis Richet, when asked to introduce the topic of the press in the French Revolution at a conference held in 1989, chose to discuss how in a period of limited literacy, "l'ouïe et le visuel ont été des voies privilégiées de la transmission d'un message contestataire."<sup>76</sup> People have always held opinions about their own place and that of others in society, and they have always talked about those opinions with their friends and neighbours. As Pierre Charron wrote in 1601, "the people... constantly grumbles and murmurs against the State, all swollen with slanders and insolent comments about those who govern and command."<sup>77</sup> Jim Given, similarly, remarked that "there were undoubtedly many sorts of "public" opinion, that of the political elites, that of well-to-do townsmen, that of laborers, and finally, most mysterious of all, that of peasants."<sup>78</sup>

Such statements may well border on the obvious, but in arguing against those who would place the "establishment of public opinion" at a precise moment in the socio-economic development of the European elite, they bear repeating. The fact that the word "opinion" was sometimes spelt "opinion" in provincial archives does not change the fact that peasants did have political opinions, and that, through a growing awareness of politics and of *la chose publique*, those opinions were becoming both more articulate and more pronounced. Victor Uribe-Uran, working on public opinion among the urban lower classes in New Granada, has reached a similar conclusion, and calls into question the assumption that "the development of a true public sphere... was hindered by the absence of printed news and propaganda and the lack of a literate population."<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the world of the illiterate was a "public sphere" by definition: learning about news orally had always implied a certain sociability, allowing Arlette Farge to describe the "words spoken in the

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<sup>76</sup> Denis Richet, "Les canaux de la propagation des idées contestataires avant la presse révolutionnaire", in Harvey Chisick, ed., *The Press in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 19-24.

<sup>77</sup> As cited in Farge, *Subversive Words*, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> Given, "The Struggle for Ideological Hegemony". See Gabriel Tarde, "Opinion and Conversation", in Terry N. Clark (ed.), *Gabriel Tarde: On Communication and Social Influence* (Chicago, 1969), pp. 297-318, on the development of "private" and "local" opinions into "public" opinion through the press, conversation, postal service and roads.

<sup>79</sup> Victor M. Uribe-Uran, "The Birth of a Public Sphere in Latin America During the Age of Revolution", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42 (2000), pp. 425-57. See also Earle, "Information and Disinformation", for a contrasting view.



heated environment of the public sphere – or the public square”.<sup>80</sup> At any rate, the very fact that French authorities in the countryside were concerned enough about peasant political chatter to make their statements the object of arrests and court cases strengthens the argument, for like Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere, the rural tribunal of opinion was capable of influencing the decision-makers of the era.<sup>81</sup>

### Tracking rural public opinion

Before we move into chapter I, one final topic needs to be addressed. Tracking the processes which produce public opinion is not a simple task, and it is not made easier when the public in question prefers to keep its opinions to itself.<sup>82</sup> The majority of the rural population of eighteenth-century France appears only indirectly in the historical record: illiterate, underprivileged, and focussed by necessity on working the land, they left no diaries, letters, or memoirs through which we might learn first-hand of their thoughts and opinions.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, although it is true that the question of political communication in the countryside has largely been overlooked, this can partly be attributed to a lack of conventional source material. For this reason, studies of oral communication – in Occidental history at least – have been pioneered by scholars working in the other social sciences. Working with accounts passed down from generation to generation, or extrapolating from analogous present day societies, cultural anthropologists have provided us with models of particular forms of oral communication, such as rumour and gossip,<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Farge, *Subversive Words*, p. ix.

<sup>81</sup> Lisa Jane Graham recently made the point that indeed, since “the crown invested more time, money and effort in policing the public of the streets, the cafés, and the markets than it did on the salons or the academies. Arguably, if the monarchy was more concerned with this broadly defined public, then we, as historians, should be too.” Graham, “Crimes of Opinion: Policing the Public in Eighteenth-Century Paris”, in Christine Adams, Jack Censer and Lisa Jane Graham (eds.), *Visions and Revisions of Eighteenth-century France* (University Park, PA, 1997), pp. 79-103; citation p. 81.

<sup>82</sup> For a perceptive discussion of such issues, see Richard Cobb, *Reactions to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1972).

<sup>83</sup> Although there are some exceptions, such accounts are rare, particularly before 1800. Those used in this study include Eugene Le Roy, *Le moulin du Frau* (Paris, 1905); Émile Guillaumin, *La vie d'un simple, ou, mémoires d'un métayer* (Paris, 1943); and Nicolas Edme Restif de la Bretonne, *Le Curé patriote* (Pantin: Castor Astral, 1989), and *La vie de mon père* (Paris, 1970). For a sampling of personal accounts from other regions of France, see Isidore Cantrel, “Souvenirs d'un paysan bas-normand (1778-1793)”, *Revue du monde catholique*, 157 (1904), pp. 60-84; G.-Michel Coissac, *Mon Limousin* (Paris, 1913); Pierre-Jakez Hélias, *Le Cheval d'Orgueil: mémoires d'un breton au pays bigouden* (Paris, 1975); and V. Gibert, “Journal d'un paysan bugiste pendant la Révolution et l'Empire”, *Bulletin de la Société des naturalistes de l'Ain*, 50 (1936), pp. 289-95.

<sup>84</sup> Edwin B. Almirol, “Chasing the Elusive Butterfly: Gossip and the Pursuit of Reputation”, *Ethnicity*, 8 (1981), pp. 293-304; Max Gluckman, “Gossip and Scandal”, *Current Anthropology*, 4 (1963), pp. 307-15; D.O.N. Handelman, “Gossip in Encounters: The Transmission of Information in a Bounded Social Setting”, *Man*, 8 (1973), pp. 217-27; Rayna Reiter, “Men and Women in the South of France: Public and Private Domains”, in Reiter (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York, 1975), pp. 252-82; Alexander



and sociologists have described the role of such activities in mass social and political movements.<sup>85</sup> While we can assert that “people have always had political opinions”, such assertions are difficult to maintain if there is no basis for them in the documentary record.

Yet, as difficult as it may be to study oral communication in the countryside, neither can we leave it out. Ideally, history should endeavour to show not only how the people were treated during the Revolution, but also how the Revolution was experienced from the perspective of the people themselves, in the tradition of writing “history from below”.<sup>86</sup> How was the Revolution lived by the peasantry? How did it reach them? What was it like in the village as news about political events arrived? How did the people react to the momentous changes and tremendous implications of the Revolution? Historians who have succeeded in writing microhistories of peasant and artisan actors of the past have shown us how rewarding the answers to such questions can be. We may know little, for example, of the mindset of sixteenth-century millers in rural Italy, and yet thanks to the diligent efforts of Carlo Ginzburg, the thoughts and opinions of one such man, Domenico Scandella – Menocchio – have been brought vividly to life.<sup>87</sup> Other attempts have brought similarly spectacular results: consider the works of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Natalie Zemon Davis, and Daniel Roche, to name only the best-known examples.<sup>88</sup>

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Rysman, “How the ‘Gossip’ Became a Woman”, *Journal of Communication*, 27 (1977), pp. 176-80; and Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumour* (Indianapolis, 1966).

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Henri Mendras, *Sociétés paysannes. Éléments pour une théorie de la paysannerie* (Paris, 1976); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1985); David Hunt, “Peasant Routes in France and Vietnam”, *Peasant Studies*, 17 (1990), pp. 141-9; and Sally Engle Merry, “Rethinking Gossip and Scandal”, in D. Black (ed.), *Toward a General Theory of Social Control* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), pp. 271-302. Certain historians of the rural and urban lower classes have adopted sociological approaches in their work, to great advantage: see Louise Tilly, “The Food Riot”; Steven L. Kaplan, *The Famine Plot Persuasion in Eighteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia, 1982); Charles Tilly, “Speaking Your Mind without Elections, Surveys or Social Movements”, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 47 (1983), pp. 461-78; and John Markoff, *The Abolition of Feudalism: Peasants, Lords, and Legislators in the French Revolution* (University Park, PA, 1996), and “Peasants Help Destroy an Old Regime and Defy a New One: Some Lessons From (and For) the Study of Social Movements”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 102 (1997), pp. 1113-42.

<sup>86</sup> This phrase and the school of thought inspired by it originates with a group of Marxist historians working in the late 1950s and early 1960s, including Albert Soboul, *Les sans-culottes parisiens en l’an II* (Paris, 1958); George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1959); and E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1964). Thompson was in fact the first to enunciate the phrase in his article “History from Below”, *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April 1966, pp. 279-80. On the continuing significance of this movement, see Lynn Hunt, “Introduction: History, Culture and Text”, in *The New Cultural History: Essays* (Berkeley, CA, 1989), pp. 1-24; Jim Sharpe, “History from Below”, in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, PA, 1992), pp. 24-41; and Eric Hobsbawm, “On History from Below”, in *On History* (New York, 1997), pp. 201-16.

<sup>87</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (New York, 1982).

<sup>88</sup> Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris, 1975); Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass./London, 1983); Daniel Roche (ed.), *Journal de ma vie: Jacques-Louis Ménétra, compagnon vitrier au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1982). See also David Sabean, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge,



While such “history from below” studies are clearly possible, they take a careful reading of sources which can be problematic. The following issues will be addressed in more detail in chapters IV and V, but a few preliminary comments are in order. The materials upon which this dissertation is based fall into two main categories. First of all, in order to study how official communication functioned in the countryside, I have consulted a wide range of administrative documents. The papers of institutions responsible for the postal and road networks reveal the importance of physical communications. National, departmental, district and canton-level assembly minutes reveal how material was passed down along the administrative hierarchy, and the *délibérations des conseils municipaux* provide colourful accounts of how information was received in the villages. The source of the unofficial, oral discussions of politics in the countryside – such as the one between Marie Bordet and the beggar Chaussonnel – are, as was established at the outset, the court records of trials for seditious speech during the French Revolution.

The study of institutions such as the postal system and the administrative hierarchy via their own archives is a relatively straightforward prospect, but the latter two sources – the *délibérations du conseil municipal* and the court trials – require somewhat more careful consideration. In both cases, the thoughts and words of an otherwise mute social group have been translated into print form, by individuals whose interest did not necessarily lie in the exact rendering of those thoughts and words.<sup>89</sup> James C. Scott, one of the great theorists of the peasantry, cautions against the use of written records for precisely this type of study:

History and social science, because they are written by an intelligentsia using written records that are also created largely by literate officials, are simply not well equipped to uncover the silent and anonymous forms of class struggle that typify the peasantry. Its practitioners implicitly join the conspiracy of the participants, who are themselves, as it were, sworn to secrecy. Collectively, this unlikely cabal contributes to a stereotype of the peasantry, enshrined in both literature and in history, as a class that alternates between long periods of abject passivity and brief, violent, and futile explosions of rage.<sup>90</sup>

Scott is not alone in voicing this concern: every historian who studies popular political

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1984); James Sharpe, *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter: A horrible and true story of football, witchcraft, murder, and the King of England* (London, 2000); and Alain Corbin, *Le monde retrouvé de Louis-François Pinagot: Sur les traces d'un inconnu, 1798-1876* (Paris, 1998). See also, in connection with this approach, Graham, *If the King Only Knew*.

<sup>89</sup> In the towns and villages of the south-west, of course, official transcriptions of peasant statements are even further removed from the original, for they have been translated from different local dialects of Occitan into French. The question of language and government will be dealt with more thoroughly in the chapters which follow.

<sup>90</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, pp. 36-7.



culture is aware of the caveats. The use of police and judicial sources, in particular, requires a light touch. Both Arlette Farge and Lisa Jane Graham have expressed the need for caution with eighteenth-century police documents, as have Carlo Ginzburg and Natalie Zemon Davis for an earlier period.<sup>91</sup> In the work of these historians, as with the seditious speech trials examined in this study, the concern is not only that outside authorities have transcribed villagers' accounts, but that given the context, the speakers were not able to speak freely. The written deliberations of municipal councils contain somewhat less risk. Earlier deliberations are more transparent than those of later years, when the threat of outside intervention and retribution led village secretaries to produce bland, formulaic and unobjectionable accounts of local political zeal. Even here, however, studies of the social origins of municipal council members have revealed them to be the wealthier, better-connected and more upwardly mobile members of peasant society, who cannot be counted upon to present the views of the poorer villagers accurately.

While the drawbacks of using written documentation to pinpoint verbal expression should be taken into account, it is my contention that these considerations should not keep us from using such archival sources altogether. If read with care and attention, police and judicial documents in particular offer an incredibly rich source of the thoughts and opinions of the illiterate. Richard Cobb, the first to make effective use of police sources for a topic other than crime, argued that they were irreplaceable: "who more than a *commissaire*", he asked, "would have heard so much of the spoken thoughts and insults of the common people?"<sup>92</sup> In those instances where the insincerity of the accused or of a witness is either apparent or suspected, the historian must take the context into account, and possibly discount the case when drawing conclusions. In countless other circumstances, however, an argument can be made for transparency even in the face of authority. The atmosphere in district and departmental courtrooms was not, after all, the same as that in the revolutionary tribunal of Paris, and except for those cases "*jugés révolutionnairement*", criminal trials were heard by a jury of local notables, at least some of whom would have been known to most defendants. Moreover, the tradition of peasant defiance was only temporarily weakened by the threat of the guillotine, and an accordingly

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<sup>91</sup> Farge, *Subversive Words*, p. viii, and Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Rules of Rebellion: Child Abductions in Paris in 1750*, trans. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 81ff; Graham, *If the King Only Knew*, pp. 12-14 and "Crimes of Opinion", p. 84; Carlo Ginzburg, "The Inquisitor as Anthropologist", in *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore, 1989), pp. 156-64; and Davis, *Return of Martin Guerre*, pp. 3-5.

<sup>92</sup> Richard Cobb, *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest, 1789-1820* (Oxford, 1970), p. 44.



large number of individuals, witnesses in particular, spoke their minds before the judge. As Lisa Jane Graham has found, judicial sources “capture the minutiae of daily life and the voice of ordinary men and women who do not always cower in the face of authority.”<sup>93</sup> Indeed, such sources provide a unique and colourful source of oral communication, and while they must be interpreted with care and attention as to context, it would be a shame indeed to leave them unused.

Having addressed the various historiographical and methodological questions which provide the framework for this dissertation, we have only to begin. The text itself is divided into five chapters. Chapter I provides an overview of how official information circulated in the countryside before the Revolution, as well as an impression of the contrasting sphere of oral discussion by which ideas and opinions were shared unofficially. Chapter II examines the impact of the French Revolution, and the tremendous volume of printed material generated by it, on the government’s ability to draft, print, and deliver information. Chapters III through V move away from questions of road conditions and postal employees to the statements and opinions of villagers on political topics, as preserved in police and judicial sources from the local level to the revolutionary tribunal in Paris. Chapter III provides an overview of the topics of discussion as well as the different ways in which statements were made, from drunken shouts heard at the door of the tavern to handwritten posters and seditious song lyrics. Chapter IV considers the archives of sedition from the perspective of their authors, delving into questions such as the ethical debate over convictions based on words alone, the attitudes of judge and jury towards peasant defendants, and the motivations of the French revolutionary government in attempting to control what was said about it. Before moving on to a conclusion, we will return, in chapter V, to the perspective of the peasantry, in an attempt to ascertain just what seditious statements reveal about rural public opinion.

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<sup>93</sup> Graham, “Crimes of Opinion”, p. 84

# I.

## THE COMMUNICATION OF NEWS AND POLITICS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Il racontait ensuite les nouvelles qu'il avait apprises, soit à Auxerre, soit à Vermanton, soit à Noyers, Tonnerre ou Vézelay. On juge avec quelle avidité elles étaient écoutées, par des gens qui habitaient un village absolument isolé!

– Restif de la Bretonne, *La Vie de mon père*

Rural communities in eighteenth-century France were often perceived as effectively cut off from the currents of information and news, due to isolating factors such as poor roads, remoteness, and linguistic and psychological obstacles. As we have seen, Eugen Weber maintained that it was not until the Third Republic that rural France was integrated into the nation,<sup>1</sup> and Alain Corbin, writing on the Limousin, put forward a similar argument when he described how rural society had remained isolated, its economic and commercial infrastructures archaic and backward, as late as 1860.<sup>2</sup> André Armengaud, finally, described eastern Aquitaine – the departments of the Tarn, Tarn-et-Garonne, Haute-Garonne, and Aude – as a “région moins développée” in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Like Weber and Corbin, Armengaud listed factors such as the persistence of traditional forms of agriculture, the almost complete lack of industrialization, illiteracy, and linguistic regionalism as responsible for keeping new ideas from circulating. Measured against an ideal of total integration into the political nation, diverse regions of France appear, as late as the nineteenth century, to have been painted with the brush of backwardness, particularism, and isolation.

This dissertation seeks to challenge the assumption that rural communities far from Paris were isolated from, and thus unaware of, the currents of news and events prior to the

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<sup>1</sup> Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*; “Comment la politique vint aux paysans.”

<sup>2</sup> Alain Corbin, *Archaisme et modernité en Limousin au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, 1845-1880* (Paris, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> André Armengaud, *Les Populations de l'Est-Aquitain au début de l'époque contemporaine: Recherches sur une région moins développée (vers 1845-vers 1871)* (Paris, 1961).



nineteenth century. The observations of Weber and others concerning the persistence of an “esprit de clocher” even after the Revolution of 1789 are not necessarily false, but they tend to underestimate the various means by which ideas circulated before the advent of the railroad, and to assume that any resistance towards “modernization”, either economic or ideological, in rural areas after 1800 was the result of helplessness and not of choice. As this study will show, the rural communities of the south-west were far from being cut off from information and ideas, even in the eighteenth century, and it was the “information explosion” of the Revolution itself that drew them into the nation, exposing them to more news and ideas than they cared to ponder.

The two areas with which this study is concerned – the Dordogne and Lot-et-Garonne on the one hand and the central Pyrenees on the other – were selected for the apparent geographical differences which they presented, providing the best contrast, within the south-west, between an area with few barriers to communication and one with many. Indeed, these differences were very real.<sup>4</sup> Compared with the plains, access to parts of the Pyrenean countryside was limited; roads tended to be of lesser quality, and were more sparsely distributed. Byroads in the mountainous regions of the central Pyrenees could often be negotiated only by a single person on horseback, and some villages were completely cut off from the valleys by snow for several months of the year. The mountain community of Sentenac d’Oust, in the Ariège, for example, sent a desperate petition to the departmental authorities in December 1792, pleading for funds to repair roads which were in “the most atrocious state imaginable”, to the extent that the villagers could no longer reach Saint-Gaudens, the nearest town, upon which they depended for their weekly provisions.<sup>5</sup> However, similar difficulties existed in other parts of rural France, including the more accessible regions of Aquitaine and Languedoc. One wealthy landowner petitioned his local district, in the Lot-et-Garonne, to repair a particularly bad road passing near his home in the town of Aiguillon, because, he said, in the winter the road was so *impraticable* that the villagers were in the habit of cutting through his garden on their way to market.<sup>6</sup> Outside the main axes, the roads which connected villages to each other and to larger towns, especially in the south, were generally described as being “en mauvais état” or “impassables”, and inclement weather could interrupt communications on all but paved

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<sup>4</sup> See Paul Vidal de la Blache, *Tableau de la géographie de la France* (Paris, 1979), pp.355-79; Chevalier, *Vie Humaine*, pp.607-28.

<sup>5</sup> A.D. Ariège, 134 Edep. Sentenac d’Oust, 1D1, 28 décembre 1792.

<sup>6</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, L755, Délibérations de l’administration du district de Tonneins, août 1790-août 1791; fol. 52v.



roads.

In spite of these difficulties, however, rural society was not closed off from the circulation of political information, particularly after 1789. With improvements in road engineering by the mid-eighteenth century, the obstacle of inadequate transportation networks was significantly reduced in importance. In addition, while the postal system had been primarily used for the private correspondence of the elite before the Revolution, it was soon adapted for both the increase in volume, and the fact that official mail now had to be delivered to every one of more than 40,000 communes throughout France. An elaborate series of institutions existed by which information was passed from one official to the next, and both the municipal council and the parish priest acted as points of contact within the village, to ensure that information reached its final destination. Moreover, "official" channels of communication such as these were only one source of information available in the countryside. In the second half of this chapter, we will consider the role of oral communication, a perennial facet of life in the provinces which had existed in the early modern period and before, and which would continue not only into the nineteenth century, but arguably, until the present day. Examples drawn from before, during and after the Revolution will illustrate the various crossroads and places of meeting where information was exchanged, before addressing two related themes: the social groups which acted as vectors of information, and the issue of gender in communicative practices. This consideration of both official and unofficial means of transferring information will complete the picture of how communication functioned in rural society at the onset of the Revolution..

### **From Versailles to Village France, or, How News Reached the Peasantry**

Our image of the interaction between rural society and the royal government during the eighteenth century tends to be one of relentless demands on the part of the monarchy, resulting in an impoverished and overwhelmed peasantry. Indeed, rural communities often preferred isolation to integration, as contact initiated by the state was usually only for such purposes as tax collection and the billeting of soldiers. However, peasants were not always disadvantaged or uninformed when it came to royal institutions, and they were not unfamiliar with the administrative apparatus that decided their fate. In some circumstances, villagers initiated direct contact with administrative and judicial institutions, appropriating the means at their disposal to contest a disagreeable situation.



Liana Vardi, for example, has studied a case in the Cambrésis/Hainault regions of the department of the Nord, in which an extended dispute over pasture rights between neighbouring villages demonstrates that peasants did, indeed, possess recourse to the law, and could successfully control the direction of the proceedings.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Olwen Hufton has argued that while judicial and administrative institutions were sometimes inadequate to redress the grievances of rural inhabitants, peasants also made use of state mechanisms when they saw fit.<sup>8</sup> Most recently, Guy Astoul has described how in late eighteenth-century Quercy, control was delegated to literate members of the rural community who were capable of political initiatives and who instituted the appropriate judicial action.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, rural communities were not uninformed about the workings of government, and neither were they completely oblivious to the circuits of news and information. However, what we are interested in here is not simply the interaction between state and population where obligation and contestation are concerned, but rather, the dissemination of edicts, news, and other material for the information of rural communities. Pierre Goubert, one of the foremost historians of rural France under the *ancien régime*, has argued that while information about the workings of government and state did arrive in the village, it would have seemed scattered and irrelevant:

... aucun des grands organismes administratifs ne touchait pourtant réellement et journellement [au «Français moyen» du temps]; ou du moins ne les apercevait-il que de fort loin, dans le cadre familial de son village et de son «pays». L'évêque, le gouverneur, l'intendant, le parlement, les grandes ordonnances, le Conseil du roi et ses arrêts, le grouillement versaillais et parisien des hommes, des intrigues, des textes, des idées et des querelles: de tout cela, la voix du curé, les petits feuillets du colporteur, des nouvelles orales plus ou moins fantastiques pouvaient lui donner épisodiquement une connaissance gauchie et tardive, si toutefois il s'y intéressait. La distance, l'abrutissement du travail, les charges de la famille, de la terre, des dettes, et quelques fables, suffisaient sans doute à lui occuper l'esprit – plus quelques rudes réjouissances saisonnières.<sup>10</sup>

True, in comparison with the revolutionary period, very few official pronouncements needed to be made in the village under the monarchy, owing both to the non-participatory nature of the government and to the fact that fewer changes took place.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, one

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<sup>7</sup> Liana Vardi, "Peasants and the Law: A Village Appeals to the French Royal Council, 1768-1791", *Social History*, 13 (1988), pp. 295-313.

<sup>8</sup> Olwen Hufton, "Le paysan et la loi en France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Annales: E.S.C.*, 38 (1983), pp. 679-700.

<sup>9</sup> Guy Astoul, "Solidarités paysannes au pays des Croquants au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle", *A.h.R.f.*, 70 (1998), pp. 25-48.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Goubert and Daniel Roche, *Les Français et l'ancien régime, vol.1: La société et l'état* (Paris, 2001), p. 194.

<sup>11</sup> As Alison Patrick has pointed out, "For the first time the French people, as well as French officials, were to be kept regularly informed of what their government was doing." Patrick, "Paper, Posters and People: Official Communication in France, 1789-1794", *Historical Studies*, 18 (1978), pp. 1-23; citation is from p. 2.



of the major sources of news and information in the eighteenth century, the *presse d'information*, left rural communities virtually untouched.<sup>12</sup> However, a structure was, indeed, in place to allow for the communication of information about new laws, local changes, and major events. Let us now turn to the institutions which were set up to distribute information which needed to be communicated to the peasantry.

### Announcements by *affiche* and *proclamation*

The announcement of important events and changes in legislation through the publication of official texts had begun, in fact, in the late fourteenth century, and had become standard practice by the era of the Wars of Religion.<sup>13</sup> Events of great political significance were marked by posters: the walls and public places of Paris were covered with placards when a king died or when a *dauphin* was born, when there was a meeting of the Estates General, or when the French army celebrated a victory. *Affiches* also notified the citizenry of new policies and affairs of government: the earliest printed posters in existence in archives today – with splinters of the wooden pillar to which they had been affixed still attached – were for the announcement of commissions for tax collection in 1544.<sup>14</sup> As Michèle Fogel describes, the official act of *affichage* involved far more than the simple posting of notices:

[Le sergent-crieur] avance à cheval dans les rues encombrées.... Aux endroits convenus, il s'arrête. Les trompettes sonnent pour retenir les passants et les rendre attentifs... ce groupe de quatre chevaliers [est] repérable et familier, et... pour certains, sinon pour tous, il [vaut] la peine d'apprendre du nouveau sur les affaires du roi ou de la ville. [...] Après que les trompettes ont ainsi évoqué la personne royale et sa puissance, le juré-crieur commence, la voix forte, détachant bien les mots, la lecture du texte. Là encore, quelle que soit l'autorité signataire, Lieutenant civil ou criminel du Châtelet, Parlement, Cour des Monnaies, Conseil du Roi, c'est le nom du Roi qui est prononcé en premier: «De par le Roy...» De la suite, parfois très longue et confuse des mots solennels il laissera la marque, apposant, sur un poteau ou sur un mur, une affiche, texte imprimé surmonté des armes du roi, avant de repartir.<sup>15</sup>

Considering “la fragilité de la parole rapidement évanouie dans l'espace urbain”, the authorities wished to make as permanent an imprint as possible upon the region in which a given law was to be applied, and the placard was therefore treated “non seulement

<sup>12</sup> Feyel, *L'Annonce*; Babeau, *Le Village*, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Posters were used not only by the authorities, but also by various groups to express opposition. Thus, periods of dissent, such as the Wars of Religion, the Ligue, the Fronde, and the Jansenist quarrels of the eighteenth century were marked not only by open rebellion, but by a war of words, fought on the walls of Paris and large towns. See Feyel, *L'Annonce*, pp. 314-31, and Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York/London, 1995), chapter 8.

<sup>14</sup> Fogel, *Les Cérémonies*, p. 105.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.



comme support de son contenu, fonction pratique, mais d'abord comme le signe de la présence royale, fonction symbolique, ce qui se lit dans sa présentation."<sup>16</sup> Whether issued by the authorities or by the people, placards in the early modern period appear to have been read with eagerness by sizable audiences, allowing them to fulfil their function, as described in contemporary dictionaries, of "informing the public".<sup>17</sup>

The announcement of news and laws also existed, in a somewhat less vibrant version, in the provinces. The use of printed posters in the countryside for informative purposes was made standard practice by the edict of April 1695; prior to this, information would have been sent out in a less-visual format, and would simply have been read aloud.<sup>18</sup> In either case, it was typically "au prône de la messe" that military victories, peace treaties, and the birth of a new *dauphin* were proclaimed with all the necessary pomp, although the episcopal edict of 1699 declared that temporal announcements were to be made after the service, with the *curé* returning to the pulpit in a less formal manner.<sup>19</sup> More routine announcements, such as those for auctions and village assemblies, and the reiteration of laws against various ill-doings, were also publicised through the use of placards which would have been read aloud. Marcel Marion notes that "l'affichage... était très usité pour la publication des ordonnances et édits, des rentes, des aliénations, pour les adjudications au rabais de réparations, de travaux...".<sup>20</sup> In general, the *publication* of official laws and missives was taken very seriously under the *ancien régime*, in rural areas as well as urban ones, such that order be maintained and "personne ne puisse prétendre ignorance" of the will of the government.<sup>21</sup>

### Communication infrastructures of the state

Thus, while rumours of the king's debauchery might not have travelled as far as

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-7.

<sup>17</sup> The first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694) defines *placard* as "un escrit ou imprimé qu'on affiche dans les places, dans les carrefours, afin d'informer le public de quelque chose". Both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> editions of the *Dictionnaire* are available online as part of the ARTFL project of the University of Chicago, <http://humanities.uchicago.edu/orgs/ARTFL/>.

<sup>18</sup> Fogel, *Les Cérémonies*, p. 106; Yves-Marie Bercé, *La Vie quotidienne dans l'Aquitaine du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1978), pp. 54-5. Considering that even during the eighteenth century, the overwhelming majority of rural inhabitants would have been illiterate, the posting of an *affiche* would have amounted to much the same thing, as a literate individual would still have been required to read it aloud.

<sup>19</sup> A.D. Dordogne, A49, Déclaration du roy pour qu'il ne soit fait aucunes publications pendant le service divin, 26 janvier 1699. See also Bernard Plongeron, *La vie quotidienne du clergé français au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1976), pp. 141-3.

<sup>20</sup> Marcel Marion, *Dictionnaire des institutions de la France au XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1968), p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> See the reiterated orders regarding the *mode de publication des ordonnances*, reprinted in the *Recueil général des anciennes lois*.



the villages of the south-west, the government was keen to keep the peasantry informed where official announcements were concerned. All information, and particularly that concerning the regular administration of the provinces, passed through a well-organised hierarchy of royal agents. Since the time of Louis XIV, most information which needed to be communicated to, or obtained from, rural communities had been passed through the *intendants*, agents who were personally appointed by the monarch himself, and who have been aptly described as the precursors of the modern-day *préfets*.<sup>22</sup> As the sovereign's representatives in the provinces, the scope of the *intendants*' responsibilities was extremely vast, encompassing virtually every aspect of provincial administration from justice and police functions to the collection of taxes, the administration of the militia, the supervision of agriculture, commerce and industry, and the construction of roads.<sup>23</sup> The degree of their independence in decision-making depended upon whether the intendency lay in a *pays d'états* or in a *pays d'élection*. In all regions, however, the *intendant* acted upon the orders of the king, translating those orders into *ordonnances*, *avis*, and *arrêtés* which were then distributed and applied locally, and supplying regular reports on his area of jurisdiction.<sup>24</sup>

While the different roles and activities of the *intendants* are certainly better known by historians, it was their local subordinates, the *subdélégués*, who were the true bearers of official information in the countryside. Considering the overwhelming number of tasks which fell under the *intendants*' jurisdiction, it is not surprising that they should have sought to delegate some of their responsibilities locally; however, this practice was resisted by central authorities, the *Parlements* in particular, and was only made an official office

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<sup>22</sup> Although the institution of the *intendants* was based upon officials and practices which predated the reign of Louis XIV, and was therefore not precisely cardinal Richelieu's "invention", it was nevertheless from the second quarter of the seventeenth century that the *intendants* knew the greatest authority and organization. See Vivian Gruder, *The Royal Provincial Intendants: A Governing Elite in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY, 1968), pp. 3-4, and Bernard Barbiche, *Les Institutions de la monarchie française à l'époque moderne, XVI<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1999), pp. 383, 399.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 392-5; Roland Mousnier, *Les Institutions de la France sous la monarchie absolue, 1598-1789* (2 vols., Paris, 1974), vol.2, pp. 495-6.

<sup>24</sup> Some of these reports, especially those produced in 1698 at the request of the Duc de Bourgogne, have been published, as part of an initiative of the C.T.H.S. in Paris. See, for example, Daniel Ligou, *L'Intendance de Bourgogne à la fin du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: édition critique du mémoire "Pour l'instruction du duc de Bourgogne"* (Paris, 1988); Jacqueline Boucher, *L'Intendance de Lyonnais, Beaujolais, Forez en 1698 et en 1762: édition critique du Mémoire rédigé par Lambert d'Herbigny et des observations et compléments de La Michodière* (Paris, 1992); and, for part of the area studied here, Françoise Moreil, *L'Intendance de Languedoc à la fin du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: édition critique du mémoire "pour l'instruction du duc de Bourgogne"* (Paris, 1985).



in 1704.<sup>25</sup> The *subdélégués* were merely “agents d’exécution et d’information”<sup>26</sup>, the “maître-Jacques”<sup>27</sup> of the administration: they represented the *intendant* locally, carrying his orders and instructions into rural areas and supervising their execution, but they did not have the power to make judgements or to act independently.<sup>28</sup> Neither were they remunerated for their efforts, as they generally held other offices in addition to that of *subdélégué*; to be chosen by the *intendant* was recompense enough, for the position carried considerable local power and respect. At any rate, there is evidence that the *subdélégués* did not carry out all the work themselves, depending in turn on a network of “correspondants”, men situated in the larger market towns and in the more inaccessible parts of the *subdélégation*.<sup>29</sup>

Although in theory the *intendants* were civil servants under the command of the king, in practice they remained in their posts for such extended periods of time that they became as much men of their province, acting as its advocate before the Royal Council.<sup>30</sup> This was even more true of the *subdélégués*, who were recruited locally and answered only to the *intendant*, and whose responsibility remained relatively informal. In his study of the peasantry of the Albigeois at the end of the eighteenth century, Pierre Rascol describes the *subdélégués* as benevolent local administrators:

Recrutés dans la bourgeoisie locale, les subdélégués se montrent en toutes circonstances les chaleureux avocats du pays: leurs rapports en témoignent assez, au point même qu’ils ne s’embarrassent pas de contradictions apparentes: par exemple, on vantera la fertilité de la région puis on s’apitoiera sur sa prétendue médiocrité, suivant le cas et les besoins de la cause, selon qu’il s’agira d’obtenir la réalisation de travaux utiles ou de dégrèvements d’impôts: mais si ces procédés

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<sup>25</sup> J. Ricommard, “Les subdélégués des intendants jusqu’à leur érection en titre d’office”, in Georges Pagès (ed.), *Études sur l’histoire administrative et sociale de l’ancien régime* (Paris, 1938), pp. 52-121. According to Hilton Root, Louis XIV’s minister Colbert disliked the use of *subdélégués*, fearing that “local officials would become enmeshed in local patronage networks and would not be reliable agents of central authority”: *Peasants and King in Burgundy: Agrarian Foundations of French Absolutism* (Berkeley, CA, 1987), pp. 76-7. Pierre de Saint-Jacob, finally, in *Les paysans de la Bourgogne du Nord au dernier siècle de l’Ancien Régime*, suggests that the *Parlement* and local members of the judiciary must have regarded the establishment of subdelegates with trepidation: “Ils faisaient pénétrer dans les campagnes l’influence de l’État, la police du commissaire départi; ils achevaient le réseau qui, depuis un demi-siècle, s’étendait dangereusement sur la mosaïque des seigneuries...”; (Paris, 1960), p. 208.

<sup>26</sup> The phrase is from Barbiche, *Les Institutions*, p. 399.

<sup>27</sup> The phrase is that of Abel Poitrineau, in *La Vie rurale en Basse-Auvergne au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, 1726-1789* (Paris, 1965), p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> Marion, *Dictionnaire des institutions*, pp. 519-20.

<sup>29</sup> Jean Merley, *La Haute-Loire de la fin de l’ancien régime aux débuts de la troisième République* (Le Puy, 1974), p. 58; Poitrineau, *La Vie rurale*, p. 40. Poitrineau points out that the role of the *correspondants* has been neglected by historians, as the archives generally contain only the correspondence between *intendant* and *subdélégués*. As a result, the *correspondants* appear as little more than “opérateurs locaux, informateurs ou figurants administratifs”, when almost certainly they were considerably more important. Poitrineau concludes with regret, however, that no documentation exists for the region of the Basse-Auvergne to confirm his hypothesis.

<sup>30</sup> Barbiche, *Les Institutions*, p. 392.



portent la marque de quelque naïveté, du moins témoignent-ils d'un vif intérêt pour le bien public.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to communicating the will of the state – as represented by that of the *intendant* – to town and village alike, the *subdélégués* also took local opinion into account. Abel Poitrineau, writing on the Basse-Auvergne, lists “surveillance de l'esprit public” among the functions of the local *subdélégués*, along with responding to government surveys, organising the recruitment of the militia, maintaining contact with local communities over issues such as tax collection, and providing assistance in times of epidemics or food shortages.<sup>32</sup> In fact, one of the primary roles of the *subdélégués* was to file regular reports of local conditions and events with the *intendant*, correspondence which is contained in the ‘C’ series of departmental archives throughout France.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, in all ways, the *subdélégués* and, to a lesser extent, the *intendants*, constituted the key link in a chain of communication which travelled from Versailles to village France and back again.

### Getting the message through:

#### Roads and the postal system in the eighteenth century

In addition to reliable personnel, the communication of official information to villages throughout France required a useable infrastructure of *voies de communication*, and the conditions of the eighteenth-century road network posed a serious problem to the regular delivery of official texts. Although the main postal arteries were among the best-maintained, the network of available routes was patchy in those areas which had never needed to be developed for royal purposes. Moreover, while there were roads leading to major towns, the insufficiency of byways which travelled cross-country or connected villages both to one another and to the market town made local communications difficult. Furthermore, the speed and efficiency of those communications depended not only upon the existence of roads, but also on their quality. Paved roads were rare, except around Paris and on those routes used by the king; where roads were paved in the provinces, moreover, it was not the entire road which was paved, but rather a strip down the middle,

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<sup>31</sup> Rascol, *Paysans de l'Albigeois*, p. 221.

<sup>32</sup> Poitrineau, *La Vie rurale*, p. 40.

<sup>33</sup> It seems likely that this correspondence, hitherto neglected by historians, might well provide access into the embryonic “public opinion” of rural inhabitants under the *ancien régime*, before the institutions and motivations of the revolutionary governments created the type of documentation upon which the present study is based. Indeed, I am hoping to pursue research in this direction in the near future.



measuring approximately fifteen feet wide.<sup>34</sup> Until about 1740, provincial economic thinking focussed upon regional interests, and local roads often consisted in narrow dirt tracks, sometimes covered over with gravel but nearly always encroached upon by neighbouring fields. While the royal government was not uninterested in the improvement of roadways, any serious initiatives were stalled by the complication of differing provincial jurisdictions which prevented a unified administration of roadworks, as well as a generalised lack of resources.<sup>35</sup>

In the final fifty years of the *ancien régime*, however, the state of communication in France improved considerably, due to both physiocratic interest and government intervention.<sup>36</sup> The development of a new profession – the *ingénieurs des ponts et chaussées* – greatly increased the quality, extension and coherence of roadworks, by employing travelling groups of skilled workers rather than conscripted local farmers. Obstacles to the circulation of traffic, such as tolls and barriers, were removed, and the main roads were improved with a stone base, increasing the speed at which carriages and horses could travel. Moreover, greater attention was paid to the efficiency of both postal and *messagerie* systems, upgrading the quality of coaches and changing the breed of horses used.<sup>37</sup> The development of navigable routes and the construction of canals much improved the possibilities for transporting heavy merchandise, reducing the general isolation of rural communities. Both an incentive to and a consequence of economic progress, the focus upon internal communication in the latter half of the eighteenth century promoted better circulation of information.

In spite of the improvements which had been made, however, attempts to ascertain

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<sup>34</sup> Rachel Canini, "Routes terrestres et routes fluviales dans le département du Lot-et-Garonne pendant la période révolutionnaire", Unpublished *mémoire* for the degree of T.E.R., 3 vols., Université de Toulouse II, 1990, p. 49.

<sup>35</sup> J. Letaconnoux, "Les voies de communication en France, au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Vierteljahrsschrift für Soziale und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 7 (1909), pp. 94-141. The fact that the *corvée* survived until the Revolution as an important means of accomplishing roadworks in spite of the numerous inconveniences and inefficiencies it represented, is indicative of the lack of financial resources. With regard to differing jurisdictions, in the *pays d'états*, including Languedoc, the administration of *ponts et chaussées* was under provincial control; thus, in order to have included these regions under a national project, the royal government would have been forced to assume their expenses. The only regions under central jurisdiction were the *pays d'élections*, and thus it was in those regions that the first attempts at a unified administration were made in 1747.

<sup>36</sup> Bernard Lepetit, *Chemins de terre et voies d'eau, réseaux de transport et organisation de l'espace* (Paris, 1984); Guy Arbellot and Bernard Lepetit, *Routes et communications*, vol. 1 of the series, *Atlas de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1987), pp. 14-6 and 32-3; Alain Dalmaso, "La Liaison routière Bas-Languedoc-Auvergne: Un exemple des relations politiques et administratives en Languedoc au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle", and Maurice Bordès, "Les Routes de Gascogne au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle", both in *Les Routes du Sud de la France, de l'Antiquité à l'époque contemporaine: Colloque tenu dans le cadre du 110<sup>e</sup> Congrès national des sociétés savantes, Montpellier, 1985* (Paris, 1985), pp. 261-71 and 331-43 respectively.

<sup>37</sup> Arbellot and Lepetit, *Routes et communications*, p. 11.



the state of communication in a given part of France are invariably met with a chorus of pessimistic views from both eighteenth- and twentieth-century authors, all of whom appear motivated to argue that their particular region of study was the most neglected, the most unfortunate, and the most deserving of improvement. Georges Bussière, writing on the Périgord on the eve of the Revolution, blamed the "immense lacune de communications proprement vicinales" for the lack of development in agriculture.<sup>38</sup> Pierre de Saint-Jacob lamented the "médiocrité des routes" in eighteenth-century Burgundy, arguably one of the better-served regions of France,<sup>39</sup> and Jean-François Soulet, an historian of the Pyrenees, felt that even in the early nineteenth century, the network of local routes was "très défectueux."<sup>40</sup> If contemporaries and historians were vociferously negative about the road conditions in the eighteenth century, they were not much more positive about the postal system. Local historians sought to highlight the improvements of the postal system after 1800, particularly through the establishment of the *poste rurale* in 1830, by denigrating the systems which had come before.<sup>41</sup> Even Arthur Young, undoubtedly drawing a comparison with his much smaller, more urbanised native land of England, was unimpressed with the French postal system, denouncing "l'insuffisance de la circulation des nouvelles en cette France d'Ancien Régime qu'une Poste au service des classes privilégiées et une presse locale quasi-inexistante contribuaient à tenir au secret."<sup>42</sup>

As with the network of roads, however, it is necessary to consider the eighteenth-century postal system for what it could accomplish, rather than bemoaning the fact that it did not yet achieve the levels of speed and efficiency which would come 25, 50 or 100 years in the future. In spite of the fact that the Physiocrats' project of a comprehensive network of roads remained "inachevé" in 1789,<sup>43</sup> and that scholars of "isolated" and "difficult" regions persisted in seeing the failures rather than the successes of the postal system, the state of communication in the eighteenth century was not irretrievable. Naturally, news and information travelled more slowly in "la France profonde", but it did

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<sup>38</sup> Bussière, *Études historiques*, vol. 1, p. 110.

<sup>39</sup> Saint-Jacob, *Les Paysans*, p. 162. Michel Vovelle includes the province of Burgundy within the parts of northern and eastern France "densement irriguée" with communications routes, *La Découverte de la politique: Géopolitique de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1993), p. 111.

<sup>40</sup> Jean-François Soulet, *Les Pyrénées au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (2 vols., Toulouse, 1987), vol. 2, pp. 195-6.

<sup>41</sup> E. Renard, *La Poste aux Lettres dans le Gard sous la Révolution, 1789-1795* (Nîmes, 1902); Charles Poujol, "Les antécédents directs de la Poste rurale: Messagers privés et messagers de l'administration, département de l'Oise (1788-1830)", *Bulletin de la Société des Amis du Musée Postal*, 26-27 (1969), pp. 1-21, 25-46.

<sup>42</sup> Guy Arbellot, "Arthur Young et la circulation en France", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 28 (1981), pp. 328-34; citation is from p. 329.

<sup>43</sup> Lepetit, *Chemins de terre*, p. 11.



travel, nevertheless.<sup>44</sup>

Originally, the word “poste” referred not to the institution responsible for delivering letters, but to a resting place along the routes of the royal couriers, where provisions, fresh horses, and accommodation could be obtained, explaining why some hotels and cafés in France today are still called “le relais” or “la poste”.<sup>45</sup> In 1597, Henri IV greatly improved the system of *relais de poste*, establishing a network of frequently travelled routes, but it was with the creation of the *Général des postes* in 1608 that a true *poste aux lettres* was inaugurated. A distinction must be made between the *poste aux chevaux* – run by the *maîtres de poste*, who kept horses for the king’s couriers while at the same time organizing the transport of the bags of correspondence supplied by the *poste aux lettres* – and the *messageries*, which carried passengers and merchandise, although the carriages used by the *messageries*, called *diligences*, usually carried mail as well. Mail for destinations along the *grandes routes* of the couriers was carried in saddlebags; later, as both the quantity of official correspondence and the need for security increased, a trunk called a *malle* was carried by a second horse, and eventually, a larger trunk was carried by a two-wheeled cart called a *brouette*.<sup>46</sup>

Major routes linked Paris to the old provincial centres; thus, for the south-west, news travelled quite quickly to Bordeaux, Toulouse, Montauban, and Limoges, and even to smaller centres such as Périgueux and Agen. The couriers, *malle-postes* and *diligences* carried the mail as far as the nearest of the *bureaux de dépêches*, which operated as a separate institution from the *maîtres de poste*, being administered by the *Ferme générale des postes* established by Louvois in 1669.<sup>47</sup> From these main drop-off points, mail was carried to the *bureaux de distribution*, which were to be found in most small provincial towns. However, once the mail reached the distribution centre, its collection became the responsibility of the *destinataire* – requiring villages to send a representative to the nearest

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<sup>44</sup> Historians of rural society, while recognizing the obstacles inherent in the system of communications, tend to conclude that information simply travelled more slowly. Guy Lemarchand, for example, has commented that participation in the 1789 elections for the Estates General was somewhat lower in the more isolated areas of the *pays de Caux*, where “la rumeur des événements est parvenue plus difficilement”; *Fin du féodalisme*, p. 404, and Peter Jones has pointed out that “peasants found out about decrees quickly enough when it suited them”; *The Peasantry*, p. 209. Jacques Bernet concurs, noting that in the department of the Oise, the decree of 3 ventôse III, which re-established the freedom of religion, was applied more quickly in the countryside than in the cities: “Les Limites de la déchristianisation de l’an II éclairées par le retour au culte de l’an III: L’exemple du district de Compiègne”, *A.h.R.f.*, 70 (1998), pp. 285-99.

<sup>45</sup> This system was known as the *poste du roi*, and was established by Louis XI in 1464. See Henri Cavallès, *La Route française: son histoire, sa fonction* (Paris, 1946), pp. 34ff, and Charles Lafon, *Histoire de la poste aux lettres en Périgord, I: de l’origine à 1792* (Périgueux, 1949), pp. 8-9.

<sup>46</sup> Lafon, *Histoire de la poste*, pp. 8-22; Bercé, *Vie quotidienne dans l’Aquitaine*, pp. 51-60.

<sup>47</sup> Cavallès, *La route française*, pp. 135-41.



post office – as did the cost of the postage, a principle which, as we shall see in chapter II, would be reconsidered under the Directory era, to prevent impoverished communes from refusing to collect official material.<sup>48</sup> While the speed of written communication may have left something to be desired,<sup>49</sup> particularly in more isolated regions, the pre-revolutionary deliberations of municipal councils leave no doubt as to whether or not official information arrived.<sup>50</sup>

### Points of contact in the village

Thus, in spite of the obstacles which threatened to isolate rural communities from the outside world, there was nevertheless an effective system in place to ensure that political material, such as orders and announcements, reached its destination. Once the messages were delivered, however, the prospect of communicating information to rural inhabitants raised a new set of problems. Widespread illiteracy, of course, represented a major impediment. While in larger towns and cities, master artisans, merchants, and members of the professional classes could read leaflets, placards, and newspapers, most villages in the departments of the *Midi* would have counted only a handful of individuals able to read.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the fact that a large proportion of the inhabitants spoke not French, but one of a series of dialects of Occitan, has also been cited as cause for the slow or impeded diffusion of news and ideas into the countryside.<sup>52</sup> In response to the Abbé Grégoire's survey on the "langue, mœurs, et état d'esprit" of the peasantry, conducted in 1790, the Jacobin club of Agen, *chef-lieu* of the Lot-et-Garonne, the least-isolated of the five departments in this study, wrote that "Il n'y a qu'un très-petit nombre de gens de la

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<sup>48</sup> Patrick, "Paper, Posters and People", p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Mousnier, *Les Institutions*, pp. 531-2.

<sup>50</sup> The deliberations of municipal councils under the *ancien régime* often reveal an overwhelmingly endless series of entries indicating material received, such that nearly each line begins with the word "reçu". For a clear illustration of this point, see A.D. Ariège, 276 Edep (*Les Cabannes*) BB3.

<sup>51</sup> On literacy in the eighteenth century, see François Furet and Jacques Ozouf, *Lire et écrire. L'alphabétisation des français de Calvin à Jules Ferry* (Paris, 1977); Roger Chartier, *Lectures et lecteurs dans la France d'ancien régime* (Paris, 1987); and John Markoff, "Some Effects of Literacy in Eighteenth-Century France", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 17 (1986), pp. 311-33. The rural south-west, along with Brittany and most departments in the Centre, Limousin and Auvergne, are indicated by the nineteenth-century study of Louis Maggiolo as having the lowest literacy levels in France at the end of the eighteenth century. In the departments included in this study, literacy rates were estimated at an average of 5% for women and 20% for men. For both the complete results of the survey and a detailed commentary, see Michel Fleury and Pierre Valmary, "Les progrès de l'instruction élémentaire de Louis XIV à Napoléon III d'après l'enquête de Louis Maggiolo (1877-1879)", *Population*, 12 (1957), pp. 71-92.

<sup>52</sup> Even in mid-nineteenth century Aquitaine, linguistic diversity slowed the passage of new ideas into the countryside; see *Les Populations de l'est-Aquitain*, p. 462. Similar assessments can be found in Philippe Vigier, "Diffusion d'une langue nationale et résistance des patois, en France, au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Romantisme*, 25-26 (1979), pp. 191-208, and Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, pp. 67-94.



campagne qui parlent et entendent le français.”<sup>53</sup>

In order to overcome these obstacles, royal officials made use of two main points of contact in the village: the communal assembly or *conseil municipal*, and the parish priest. In the *Midi*, including south-western Languedoc and Guyenne, municipal councils were extremely well-organised, contrary to the claims of some more general works, which tend to take northern and eastern France as the norm.<sup>54</sup> In addition to the *greffier*, the council consisted of two to four *consuls*, who were either named by the *seigneur* from a list supplied either by the community or by the outgoing *consuls*, or, more often, elected by *assemblée générale*, that is, by all heads of household, including widows. In fact, village councils functioned quite democratically: whether the issues at hand involved drawing up tax rolls, deciding upon the date of the grape harvest, or taking a local grievance to the courts, decisions were commonly put to the community as a whole.<sup>55</sup>

Municipal councils held a degree of political autonomy in accordance with their long-established traditions,<sup>56</sup> and this official recognition made them an important final link in the series of administrative levels by which political information was passed to the peasantry. Paul d'Hollander, in his work on the Limousin during the early part of the Revolution, noted that those parishes which were too small to constitute a municipality were disadvantaged, as they were kept “à l'écart du réseau de transmission des lois et informations officielles.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, those individuals elected to the council were naturally among the more important members of the community where they lived – larger landowners, important artisans, lawyers and notaries, and often, the *curé* – individuals

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<sup>53</sup> Augustin Gazier, *Lettres à Grégoire sur les patois de France 1790-1794: Documents inédits sur la langue, les mœurs et l'état des esprits dans les diverses régions de la France* (Geneva, 1969), p. 115.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Mousnier, *Les Institutions*, vol.1, pp. 428-36.

<sup>55</sup> This description is somewhat simplified in the interest of brevity. For more information, see Albert Babeau, *Les assemblées générales des communautés d'habitants en France du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle à la Révolution* (Paris, 1893); Maurice Bordès, *L'administration provinciale et municipale en France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1972); and Gutton, *Sociabilité villageoise*. On the specificity of the south-west, see Fournier, *Démocratie et vie municipale*, and Jacques Godechot, “Aux origines du régime représentatif en France: Des conseils politiques languedociens aux conseils municipaux de l'époque révolutionnaire”, in Ernst Hinrichs *et al.* (eds.), *Vom Ancien Régime zur Französischen Revolution. Forschungen und Perspektiven* (Göttingen, 1978), pp. 11-23. Although most smaller localities did not keep recorded minutes of their meetings before 1789, there is plenty of evidence for their previous existence in phrases and habits which recall the *ancien régime*. Municipal officers, for example, are often called *consuls* or *syndics* in the Pyrenees and *conseillers* in Aquitaine, and the assembled parish is still referred to, in the early years of the Revolution, as “la plus grande et saine partie des habitants”.

<sup>56</sup> Basic “assemblées des habitants” had existed since the middle ages, obtaining institutional recognition through a series of negotiations with royal authority. See Marc Bloch, *Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française* (Paris, 1960), pp. 172-94; Hilton Root, “État et communautés villageoises dans la France moderne: en Bourgogne aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles”, *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 39 (1992), pp. 303-23; Babeau, *Le Village*, p. 21; and Saint-Jacob, *Les Paysans*, pp. 81-2.

<sup>57</sup> Paul d'Hollander, “Les gardes nationales en Limousin (juillet 1789-juillet 1790)”, *A.h.R.f.*, 64 (1992), pp. 465-89; citation p. 468.



who were likely to be in contact with the outside world, a fact which facilitated the transfer of information. When there was an announcement to be made, it was the *greffier* who would notify the council and proceed to convoke the assembly: the parish bells, immemorial harbingers of news in the countryside,<sup>58</sup> would peal out to gather the inhabitants in assembly, and the *tambour*, a young boy with a drum, would proclaim the laws throughout the hamlets and outlying regions of the commune.<sup>59</sup> In addition to consulting all heads of family on important issues, general assemblies were also held for the communication of news and official texts. As Albert Babeau, a nineteenth-century historian of rural society, wrote:

Lorsque le nombre de ceux qui savaient lire était restreint, il fallait réunir les habitants pour porter à leur connaissance les lois et les avis qui les intéressaient; on le faisait soit dans l'église, au prône, soit à l'issue de la messe, devant la porte de l'église. Les habitants, convoqués par le juge, écoutaient; après avoir écouté, ils faisaient leurs réflexions d'autant plus développées que le sujet les touchait de plus près.<sup>60</sup>

Pierre de Saint-Jacob, similarly, describes how in Burgundy the *communauté d'habitants* would gather "dans un forum municipal où l'on entend les communications du sergent de la justice, la lecture des arrêts du Parlement ou des ordonnances de l'intendant."<sup>61</sup> At a time when travel was difficult and newspapers rare, such methods of communication meant that the most humble peasant could hear of great events.<sup>62</sup>

The existence of an administrative body at the village level, therefore, completed the chain of official institutions, and assured the delivery of official messages to the rural population. However, the responsibility for communicating those messages usually fell to the one individual who was almost invariably able to read and write: the parish priest. "Fully aware of the pivotal position occupied by the parish priest within the village," Timothy Tackett writes, "the lay authorities attempted to use him as a means of communication with the rural inhabitants."<sup>63</sup> Municipal councillors were sometimes educated, particularly in larger villages and small *bourgades* with a greater population of rural elite on which to draw, but it was not a pre-requisite for the position, and it was not

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<sup>58</sup> Alain Corbin, *Les Cloches de la Terre: Paysage sonore et culture sensible dans les campagnes au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1994), esp. pp. 159-93; see also Babeau, *Le Village*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>59</sup> A distinction is made between the *lecture des lois*, which is done by the *secrétaire* or *greffier*, and their *publication*, more akin to the work of the *crieur public* of larger towns, which was undertaken by the *tambour* or *valet de ville*.

<sup>60</sup> Babeau, *Le Village*, p. 21. At the time Babeau was writing, this practice was still current in some areas.

<sup>61</sup> Saint-Jacob, *Les Paysans*, p. 81.

<sup>62</sup> Babeau, *Le Village*, pp. 106-7.

<sup>63</sup> Timothy Tackett, *Priest and Parish in Eighteenth-Century France: A Social and Political Study of the Curés in a Diocese of Dauphiné, 1750-1791* (Princeton, NJ, 1977), p. 162.



uncommon, in smaller localities, for the majority of officers to be illiterate.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, although announcements of great import, such as the birth of a *dauphin*, would have been publicised immediately throughout the village, as described above, more routine information was normally communicated from the pulpit, as it was at mass that the greatest number of inhabitants could be expected to gather together.

Thus, by acting as intermediaries, parish priests played a significant role in overcoming the obstacle of illiteracy and the lack of understanding of French in the communication of official information to the village. However, the problem was not only one of linguistic differences, as Jean-François Soulet, writing on the Pyrenees in the early nineteenth century, points out. While it is true that “la difficulté ou, souvent, l’incapacité qu’éprouvent alors maints Pyrénéens à s’exprimer en français perturbent tous leurs rapports avec les «étrangers», notamment avec les représentants de l’Administration,” this “incapacité” was as much the result of conscious resistance as of isolation. Moreover, the “jargon administratif” in which official texts were written would have required an educated “translator”, even had knowledge of French not been an issue.<sup>65</sup> Although many individuals in rural society would have been able to understand French, particularly the artisans and others who travelled or spent time in nearby towns, they still required literate, bilingual intermediaries in general, not only to read, but to make sense of official texts. Thus it is apt that parish priests have been described as the “cultural oxygen” of their community, for they played an essential, complex role of reader, translator, and interpreter to their unenlightened parishioners.<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, it was more than simply their linguistic abilities which made parish priests the ideal go-between for royal authorities attempting to communicate with villagers. When the finance minister Turgot was attempting to bring about reforms in 1763, he harnessed the medium of the pulpit in his attempt to make his changes known to the rural population. In addition to asking parish priests to undertake a number of administrative responsibilities

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<sup>64</sup> Abel Poitrineau has confirmed precisely this point for the Burgundian countryside: “Le curé fait, en maintes occasions, fonction d’«administrateur parallèle», parce qu’il est, au village, l’homme instruit; au contraire, les consuls et les syndics ... sont souvent illettrés et incompetents; ils jouent, les consuls en tant qu’assesseurs-collecteurs notamment, le rôle de «responsables», véritables «otages» voués aux foudres du fisc en cas de défaillance des contribuables.” Poitrineau, *La Vie rurale*, p. 41.

<sup>65</sup> Soulet, *Les Pyrénées*, t.2, pp. 196-8.

<sup>66</sup> Gruder, “Can we hear the voices”, p. 171. On the role of parish priests as intermediaries in general, see also the conference proceedings *Les Intermédiaires culturels: Actes du colloque du Centre Méridional d’Histoire Sociale, des Mentalités et des Cultures*, juin 1978 (Aix-en-Provence, 1981), especially the contributions by Timothy Tackett, “La correspondance de Dominique Chaix (1772-1799): un document sur le curé de campagne à la fin de l’ancien régime”, and Martine Lapied, “Le Rôle d’intermédiaire des curés au début de la Révolution de 1789 à travers la rédaction des cahiers de doléances comtadins”; as well as Tackett, *Priest and Parish*, and Gutton, *Sociabilité villageoise*.



– making them into “natural subdelegates”, as he called them – Turgot took the *curés* into his confidence, beseeching them to

...use their influence to promote reform and to counteract the attempts of influential landowners to frustrate the administration... Living among the peasantry, sharing its suffering and its privations, they were able to break down little by little the barriers of prejudice, hostility and fear.<sup>67</sup>

Parish priests were thus often unwitting local accomplices of government policy, acting as “pulpit propagandists” for the authorities.<sup>68</sup> In the wake of the Flour Wars, for example, the king sent out an *instruction circulaire* to all parish priests, beseeching them to communicate to their parishioners “les vérités de l’économie politique”.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, church and state had always worked together, each helping the other to rule over the commoners. Momentous events, such as great victories and peace treaties, were announced by letters from bishops, in which it was prescribed that the *curé* recite a *Te Deum*, and the practice of reading out *monitoires*, or injunctions to reveal knowledge of unsolved crimes such as murders and pillaging, greatly aided the efforts of the local *maréchaussée*.<sup>70</sup>

This system of communication worked so well, in fact, that during the early years of the Revolution, authorities were keen to continue using parish priests as spokesmen for the government. However, while parish priests were undoubtedly more educated than their parishioners, they, like the true *subdélégués* we met earlier, were likely to feel more loyalty towards rural society than towards the representatives of the state, and thus they rarely presented information in an unbiased manner. Bernard Plongeron, writing generally of parish priests as the “gérants” of their parishes, explains that when a *curé* transmitted administrative information and news through the medium of a Sunday mass, “loin de se borner au rôle d’annonceur, il n’hésite pas à prendre les gens à partie.”<sup>71</sup> Pierre de Saint-Jacob concurs, describing how the announcement of news by the parish priest led to discussion in general. “Le prône d’un curé, mêlé de si près à toutes les formes de la vie villageoise, s’accompagne d’informations publiées là officiellement et qui suscitent parfois dans l’assistance des commentaires immédiats, souvent bruyants.”<sup>72</sup> As we shall see in

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<sup>67</sup> Douglas Dakin, *Turgot and the Ancien Régime in France* (London, 1939), p. 58.

<sup>68</sup> This expression is from Jones, *The Peasantry*, p. 25. See also Babeau, *Le Village*, pp. 105-7, and Tackett, *Priest and Parish*, chapter 6.

<sup>69</sup> Babeau, *Le Village*, pp. 106-7.

<sup>70</sup> On *Te Deums*, see Gruder, “Can we hear the voices”, p. 168; on the practice of reading *monitoires*, Gutton, *Sociabilité villageoise*, pp. 199-202, Babeau, *Le Village*, pp. 107-8; Hufton, “Paysan et la loi”, and *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 11-21, on the passing of information from the bishop to parish priests.

<sup>71</sup> Plongeron, *La vie quotidienne du clergé*, p. 142.

<sup>72</sup> Saint-Jacob, *Les Paysans*, p. 81.



chapter III, the role of the parish priest as a communicator and translator of the official political line would, in many localities, cause serious difficulties for the revolutionaries, and later attempts to have municipal officers read the news and laws on *décadis* in churches converted into *temples de la raison* were largely unsuccessful.<sup>73</sup>

### “Unofficial” Communication

Between the existence of an administrative hierarchy, which facilitated the transfer of material from king through *intendants* and *subdélégués* to village municipal councils, and the role played by local parish priests as readers and interpreters, royal authorities were well-equipped to communicate official information to the peasantry. Important announcements were normally posted up in placard form, where they could be read out and translated to rural subjects, while regular correspondence was read on Sundays, either from the pulpit after mass, or in a general assembly on the village square. Government attempts at road improvement in the second half of the eighteenth century greatly improved communication, and the postal service, while intended primarily for important missives and the correspondence of the elite, appears to have functioned sufficiently for the relatively small amount of information which needed to be sent into the provinces as well. Overall, peasants in the eighteenth century do not appear to have been as isolated and ignorant as is often assumed.

However, official texts and news bulletins were not the only source of political information available in the countryside. Oral communication, including reported news, rumour, and individuals’ statements of their opinions and ideas, constituted a major, and indeed more established, means of conveying information. The eighteenth-century French countryside was, in fact, home to a dynamic, active society in which a great deal of daily information was received verbally, in face-to-face encounters. Under the Revolution, the level of talk would only intensify, with conversation being increasingly concerned with political issues. Country people were both curious about the developments taking place and well-used to getting their information from people they knew or met. To ask, “what’s the news” in early modern society was “more than a customary greeting”, according to Dagmar Freist. “Especially at times of crisis, people’s hunger for news increased and

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<sup>73</sup> This practice will be discussed in more detail in chapter II.



politics spilled over into everyday life.”<sup>74</sup> Indeed, what Robert Darnton has said of eighteenth-century Paris is no less true for the gathering places of the countryside: if we want to hear what rural citizens had to say about the government, we have only to stand in the right place and listen.<sup>75</sup>

This rich tapestry of oral exchange was not unique to south-west France: scholars of many different countries have confirmed the centrality of the daily processes of oral communication in the early modern world. Thought-provoking parallels exist for seventeenth-century England,<sup>76</sup> Reformation Germany,<sup>77</sup> and early modern Switzerland<sup>78</sup> and Castile.<sup>79</sup> Nor was the phenomenon limited to Europe: studies of New England, Northern Africa and Latin America have shown that oral exchange at specific places of meeting are a universally identifiable feature of rural communication.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists have long recognised the perennial importance of oral information gathering in preliterate societies. Iliya Harik, working on the reception of mass media in twentieth-century rural Egypt, noted the tremendous proportion of villagers who received their information second-hand, from another individual who had read the newspaper or heard a news report and who had then passed on the information.<sup>81</sup> In another case, thousands of miles and 150 years away in early nineteenth-century New Granada, Rebecca Earle confirms the centrality of oral communication to the spread of information among the illiterate rural population. “The non-written world of conversation and hearsay was a rich source of news and information”, Earle submits; “the absence of accessible written or printed sources of news was remedied by the active generation of oral reports, spread by both locals and

<sup>74</sup> Dagmar Freist, “The King’s Crown is the Whore of Babylon: Politics, Gender and Communication in Mid-Seventeenth-Century England”, *Gender and History*, 7 (1995), pp. 457-81; citation is from p. 458.

<sup>75</sup> Darnton, “An Early Information Society”, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Fox, “Rumour”, and *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford, 2000); Cust, “News and Politics”, pp. 65-6; Freist, “The King’s Crown”, and more recently, *Governed by Opinion: Politics, Religion and the Dynamics of Communication in Stuart London, 1637-1645* (London, 1997).

<sup>77</sup> Robert Scribner, “Oral Culture and the Diffusion of Reformation Ideas”, *History of European Ideas*, 5 (1984), pp. 237-56; and *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Oxford, 1994).

<sup>78</sup> Beat Kümin, “Useful to Have, but Difficult to Govern: Inns and taverns in Early Modern Bern and Vaud”, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 3 (1999), pp. 153-75.

<sup>79</sup> David Vassberg, *The Village and the Outside World in Golden Age Castile: Mobility and Migration in Everyday Rural Life* (New York, 1996).

<sup>80</sup> Barbara Karsky, “Sociability in New England Farming Communities,” in Barbara Karsky and Elise Marienstras (eds.), *Travail et loisir dans les sociétés pré-industrielles* (Nancy, 1991), pp. 43-57; Brown, *Knowledge is Power*, esp. ch.3; Omar Carlier, “Le Café Maure. Sociabilité masculine et effervescence citoyenne (Algérie XVII<sup>e</sup> - XX<sup>e</sup> siècles)”, *Annales E.S.C.*, 45 (1990), pp. 975-1003; and Uribe-Uran, “Birth of a Public Sphere”.

<sup>81</sup> Iliya F. Harik, “Opinion Leaders and the Mass Media in Rural Egypt: A Reconsideration of the Two-Step Flow of Communications Hypothesis”, *American Political Science Review*, 65 (1971), pp. 731-40.



travellers.”<sup>82</sup>

However, from our vantage point at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when daily newspapers, radio and television broadcasts, and computer technology have long since made information readily available, it is perhaps difficult to understand the importance of word-of-mouth communication in an eighteenth-century rural setting. How are we to listen to conversations long since finished, or to locate favoured spots of discussion? Two types of sources will help us to do this. First of all, contemporary descriptions of rural society, whether institutional or personal in nature, depict a continuity in the forms of rural communication and sociability from the *ancien régime* until the Third Republic, forms, one could even argue, that still exist today.<sup>83</sup> The second set of records arise from the police efforts, especially during the Revolution, to discover what was said about the government and its works; the local police were well aware of the breeding grounds of such talk, and their records lead us to them.<sup>84</sup> I propose that we now visit these places of meeting, both to witness their role in rural society as nodes of interaction and exchange, and to eavesdrop on some of the political conversations which took place there before and during the Revolution.

### Places of meeting and exchange in the village

Any study of sociability and contact in rural areas must begin with the parish itself, for from the dawn of the modern era, the very grouping together of peasant households around a church and square created the basic places of meeting and discussion. The village was a dynamic place, and the inhabitants were intimately acquainted with

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<sup>82</sup> Earle, “Information and Disinformation”, p. 175. Earle writes that not even the Atlantic ocean impeded the spread of gossip, as travellers carried news of families left behind in Spain.

<sup>83</sup> The regulation and policing of places of sociability has ensured that much information about them has survived. In the case of those places where alcohol was consumed, the combined efforts of the royal government (to ensure proper taxes were paid), of the police (to ensure that measures were standardised and opening hours respected), and of the church (to ensure that they did not become places of ill-repute) produced numerous archival documents. For the first two institutions, references can be found in local administrative correspondence as well as in communal archives. For the third, the reports of eighteenth-century episcopal visits to the parishes are extremely useful: see Gabriel Le Bras, *et al.* (eds.), *Répertoire des visites pastorales de la France, Série I: Anciens diocèses [jusqu'en 1790]* (4 vols., 1977-1985). Personal accounts add validation and colour: see, for example, Restif de la Bretonne, *La Vie de mon père* (1970); Georges Rocal, *Le Vieux Périgord*, (Toulouse, 1927); and Guillaumin, *La Vie d'un Simple*.

<sup>84</sup> Documents arising from the prosecution of words spoken against the government are to be found in the judicial series appropriate for the period. During the *ancien régime*, a few rare trials for verbal sedition can be found in the papers of the courts of the sénéchaussée (series B of the Departemental Archives); for the early Revolution, in the papers of the Comité des Rapports (D XXIX) and, to a lesser extent, Comité des Recherches (D XXIX bis) at the A.N.; and, for the remainder of the Revolution, in the papers of the tribunaux correctionnels, criminels, and révolutionnaires of the Departemental Archives. Somewhat less accessible but rewarding of the effort are those investigations contained in police and administrative archives at the communal, cantonal and district level (series L and *archives communales déposées*).



everyone's affairs: conversations took place in the streets, as people made their way to and from the fields, the mill and other places of work. Victor Hugo, in *Les Misérables*, remarked upon this perennial site of communication after his memorable tale of a conversation between a traveller with a damaged wheel and a village wheel-wright:

Si sa conversation avec le charron eût eu lieu dans une chambre de l'auberge, elle n'eût point eu de témoins, personne ne l'eût entendue, les choses en fussent restées là, et il est probable que nous n'aurions eu à raconter aucun des événements qu'on va lire; mais cette conversation s'était faite dans la rue. Tout colloque dans la rue produit inévitablement un cercle. Il y a toujours des gens qui ne demandent qu'à être spectateurs.<sup>85</sup>

As Daniel Roche has pointed out for the *faubourgs* of eighteenth-century Paris, "there was no division between house and street, into which the whole neighbourhood overflowed from nearby houses, workshops, shops and taverns."<sup>86</sup> Barbara Karsky, similarly, has observed of eighteenth-century rural New England, that the places of work and leisure were intermingled in pre-industrial societies, creating an atmosphere of constant exchange.<sup>87</sup>

In rural France, several important places of meeting stand out. The *place publique*, which was often bordered with stone benches and towering plane trees, was by definition a place of meeting and discussion, and when covered by an *halle*, also became the site for measuring grain, and possibly, for a weekly market.<sup>88</sup> The parish church was a central gathering point for much more than religious affairs. As we have seen, after mass, peasants would remain in front of the church, discussing village issues and any news that might have arrived, and the parish priest would read and explain any royal decrees, and possibly the newspaper.<sup>89</sup> John Markoff, citing Jean Nicolas and Guy Lemarchand on the eighteenth century, and his own research for the revolutionary period, has shown that prior to the increased politicisation of daily life brought by the Revolution, the greatest number of conflicts and organised insurrections took place on Sundays, when peasants came together for dialogue and entertainment as much as to hear the Mass.<sup>90</sup> The mixture

<sup>85</sup> I (7) v, Yves Gohin (ed.) (Collection Folio Classique, 2 vols., Paris, 1995), t.1, p. 333.

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Roche, *The People of Paris*, trans. Marie Evans and Gwynne Lewis (Leamington Spa, 1987), p. 246.

<sup>87</sup> Karsky, "Sociability".

<sup>88</sup> See Yves Rinaudo, "Sur la place", *Cahiers d'histoire*, 32 (1987), pp. 361-80, and Gilles-Henri Bailly and Philippe Laurent, *La France des halles et marchés* (Toulouse, 1998), pp. 15-49.

<sup>89</sup> See Gabriel Le Bras, *L'Église et le village* (Paris, 1976).

<sup>90</sup> Markoff, *Abolition*, pp. 204-5, 306-22. Markoff cites Jean Nicolas, "Les émotions dans l'ordinateur: premiers résultats d'une enquête collective", a paper presented at the University of Paris VII, October 1986, and Guy Lemarchand, "Troubles populaires au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et conscience de classe: Une préface à la Révolution française," *A.h.R.f.*, 62 (1990), pp. 32-48.



of work and socialising also changed and evolved with the rhythms of the agricultural season. Thus, after the intensive period of the harvest and vintage had passed, peasants would gather for a *veillée* in the house of an individual, or in a warmly lit barn, talking and telling stories while carrying out winter tasks, such as shelling chestnuts, spinning wool, and weaving baskets.<sup>91</sup>

### Markets and fairs

Beyond what was common to almost every community, some locations might act as crossroads, drawing people together. Thus villages which boasted a major road, a *relais de poste*, or a weekly market would be more likely to have several taverns or inns, regardless of their size. Perhaps the greatest confluence of people and ideas occurred when peasants travelled outside their village to the nearest *bourg*, which was often an administrative centre and would almost certainly host a weekly market and occasionally a fair. Peasants travelled to market towns for a variety of reasons: economic and consultative needs existed alongside a purely social motivation, for the centre of a relatively busy town of 1000-2000 people would put peasants from outlying areas into contact with acquaintances, colleagues and friends, with whom they could share a bottle of wine at the local tavern. As a result of such encounters and socialising, whether within the village or in the nearby town, many discussions took place, and politics, especially during the Revolution, inevitably entered into these.

The role played by the weekly market was essential to the rural economy, from the early modern period through the nineteenth century.<sup>92</sup> Traditionally, it was the woman of the household who would take home-grown vegetables, eggs, cheese, and poultry, and bringing home some of the precious currency that was needed to pay the taxes, and to buy goods which could not be produced at home. Although most rural households in the eighteenth century practised subsistence agriculture, especially in the south where small holdings prevailed over open-field systems, by the end of the century, a certain tendency to specialise in saleable crops began to appear, and peasants increasingly depended upon the goods they could sell and exchange for other necessities. This had always been the case, of course, in areas such as wine-growing and shepherding regions, where villagers

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<sup>91</sup> See Pierre-Louis Menon and Roger Lecotte, *Au village de France: la vie traditionnelle des paysans* (Paris, 1945), and also Martyn Lyons, "Oral Culture and Rural Community in Nineteenth-Century France: the *veillée d'hiver*", *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 23 (1986), pp. 102-114.

<sup>92</sup> See the remarks of Poitrineau on "le bourg, la ville et la route", *La Vie rurale*, pp. 673ff, and of Rascol on "les centres de relations", *Paysans de l'Albigeois*, pp. 82ff.



could not produce everything locally.<sup>93</sup> The relationship between the market town and the surrounding countryside was one of mutual dependence, for although many townsmen maintained strong ties to the land, even planting crops near the edge of town, the gradual urbanisation and specialisation of artisan and professional classes resulted in a greater need of provisioning from the agricultural sector.

The existence of a weekly market in a large village or small town was also a question of prestige and urban importance. The right to hold a market was, like everything else in the *ancien régime*, a combination of privilege, tradition and payment, and was jealously guarded as a guarantee of prosperity for the town.<sup>94</sup> In fact, the drawing power of the market or fair, and the importance of the town as both a political and economic centre, each fed directly into the other. Alain Audras has described how for the Haute-Loire, the presence of a market was "le principal facteur d'importance et de rayonnement" for the towns, most of which were cantonal seats during the Revolution.<sup>95</sup> Dominique Margairaz has confirmed this observation for the whole of France, showing that at the end of the eighteenth century, 36.5% of market towns had a population of 2,000 or greater, and over 50% were towns with administrative functions.<sup>96</sup> Although fairs fell into a somewhat different category and were generally more rural by nature, the majority were still held near a town of reasonable size and preferably on a major road, in order to provide the greatest number of advantages.<sup>97</sup> The presence of more specialised artisans, such as tinsmiths, watchmakers, and tailors, would serve to attract the peasantry from the surrounding area, as would the pedlars and larger shopkeepers, with their wide variety of wares. It was also during visits to the local town that peasants obtained professional services: one took advantage of the market day to visit the dentist, barber, and veterinarian, as well as the notary and possibly the banker.<sup>98</sup> The local *bourg* represented

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<sup>93</sup> Dominique Margairaz, *Foires et marchés dans la France pré-industrielle* (Paris, 1988), p. 175; Alain Audras, "Les foires et marchés en Haute-Loire", *Revue d'Auvergne*, 97 (1983), pp. 37-50, esp. p.45; and Jack Thomas, *Le Temps des Foires: Foires et marchés dans le Midi toulousain de la fin de l'Ancien régime à 1914* (Toulouse, 1993), p. 214. In particular, mountain communities were unlikely to be able to produce everything they needed, specialising instead in certain types of produce and animal products such as goat's cheese and sheep's wool, which they brought down to the valley for the weekly market; see Chevalier, *Vie humaine*, pp.628-31.

<sup>94</sup> Margairaz, *Foires et marchés*, pp. 13-27, 55-68.

<sup>95</sup> Audras, "Les foires et marchés", p. 39. On the administrative role of cantonal seats, see chapter II, pp. 89-90.

<sup>96</sup> Margairaz, *Foires et marchés*, p. 175.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141ff.

<sup>98</sup> See Thomas, *Le Temps des Foires*, pp. 155-98, on markets and fairs as the "carrefour des services". For additional colourful descriptions of the assortment of characters present on market-day, see Rocal, *Vieux Périgord*, pp. 225-6; Pierre Goubert, *The French Peasantry in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Ian Patterson (New York, 1986), pp. 144-7; and Menon and Lecotté, *Au village de France*, p. 113.



a multi-faceted occasion for peasants to meet both familiar faces and strangers, to exchange news, and to participate in all manner of conversation.

While the weekly markets existed primarily for economic purposes, the more infrequent fairs were considered to be social gatherings as much as economic ones, and were eagerly awaited.<sup>99</sup> In fact, the boundaries between fairs and other sorts of periodic attractions, such as festivals and pilgrimages, were often blurred.<sup>100</sup> It was more likely to be at the fair, rather than at the market, that one could expect to find pedlars, fortune-tellers and gypsies, and the visiting of cabarets and cafés was more explicitly characteristic of the former than of the latter.<sup>101</sup> “Ne va aux foires que pour tes affaires, il y aura toujours assez de fainéants, d’ivrognes et de gourmands sans toi,” advises an old witticism from the plains of the Parisian basin.<sup>102</sup> By tradition, local fairs were conducted on the same day as a religious holiday, often the holiday of the patron saint of the village, thus avoiding the loss of a day’s work. Such were the attractions of the fairground, that, unsurprisingly, few parishioners would attend religious services; as Voltaire remarked ironically in his *Dictionnaire philosophique*,

Ce sont...les cabaretiers, sans doute, qui ont inventé ce prodigieux nombre de fêtes: la religion des paysans et des artisans consiste à s’enivrer le jour d’un saint qu’ils ne connaissent que par ce culte: c’est dans ces jours d’oisiveté et de débauche que se commettent tous les crimes...<sup>103</sup>

The responses to an 1845 survey conducted by Mgr Rendu, bishop of the diocese of Annecy, of 290 parishes in northern Savoy paint a clear picture of excitement at travelling to the town, dancing and drinking on the part of the villagers, and exasperation on the part of the priests. “Ils ont la coutume d’aller beaucoup aux foires, ce qui nuit beaucoup à leurs affaires,” was the wry comment of Jean-Marie Delerce, priest at the tiny village of Chêne on the western border of the Haute-Savoie.<sup>104</sup> The priest at Larringes, similarly, commented that for the local fair,

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<sup>99</sup> As Yves-Marie Bercé points out, “These gatherings of people were too incessant to be explained simply by economic need”; *History of Peasant Revolts: The Social Origins of Rebellion in Early Modern France*, trans. Amanda Whitmore (Ithaca, NY, 1990), p. 20.

<sup>100</sup> This is apparent from numerous sources; see esp. Margairaz, *Foires et marchés*, pp. 158-9.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205. Incidentally, Margairaz writes that fairs were linked to the presence of pedlars “dans l’imagination plus que dans les faits”; this point will be debated further on, when we discuss the role of transients in rural communication. In contrast, Pierre Goubert notes that squatters, pedlars, potters, barbers, tooth-pullers, and medicine-sellers all frequented the towns on market days, sometimes going as far as the bigger villages, but never risking going to the smaller ones. *French Peasantry*, pp. 144-7.

<sup>102</sup> The proverb comes from the region of the Beauce; see Menon and Lecotté, *Au village de France*, p. 131.

<sup>103</sup> Voltaire, François Marie Arouet de, *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (9 vols.; vols. 47-55 in *Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire*, Neuchâtel, 1785), “Fêtes”, vol. 5 [vol. 51 des *Oeuvres complètes*], pp. 338-9.

<sup>104</sup> Roger Devos and Charles Joisten, *Moeurs et coutumes de la Savoie du Nord au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle: l’enquête de Mgr Rendu* (Annecy/Grenoble, 1978), p. 154. Response written 15 juin 1845; population of Chêne, 412 inhabitants.



...on y vient des paroisses voisines en grand nombre, non seulement pour jouer, mais pour boire jusqu'à ivresse. Alors on se querelle, on se bat et ensuite les procès-verbaux se font. Ce désordre dure trois ou quatre jours, et c'est toujours par le dimanche qu'il commence, parce qu'il y a pour ces jours là et la foire plusieurs cabarets, outre un qui est établi...<sup>105</sup>

On the one hand, some socialising and alcohol consumption was part of the business of the occasion, for a purchase as significant as that of livestock had always to be sealed with a drink. On the other hand, as the records of local courts from the eighteenth century demonstrate, insults, arguments and fistfights frequently broke out in cabarets, and especially after fairs and markets, when such "socialising" was at a peak.<sup>106</sup> The new political reference points introduced by the Revolution would, of course, be hotly debated in this same setting, and he who had uttered words against the government would find himself explaining his motivations to a judge.

In addition to the town professionals and artisans, markets and fairs put peasants from outlying villages in contact with numerous rural outsiders, thus giving them a broader perspective than that which they would know from the village. The journey itself was often undertaken in common with other peasants, particularly in the case of fairs, which might well be far enough away to necessitate an overnight stay.<sup>107</sup> Conversation would break the monotony of the long walk, and at times the words spoken along the road, either by a companion or a passer-by, have been immortalised in the archives: when Parié Galet of the town of Nérac was arrested in Year VII for having attempted, "sur la grande route", to discourage a soldier from rejoining his unit, it was a local labourer returning from the fair at Condom (Gers) who overheard his remarks and reported them to the

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300. Réponse du 30 mai 1845, de Pierre-Joseph Viollat, recteur à Larringes (pop. 1101). Viollat's comment regarding the court trials resulting from drunken conflicts is echoed by the *curé* of Cuvat (pop. 733): "L'usage d'aller à Annecy tous les jours de marché, est malheureusement trop établi chez presque tous les chefs de famille; ainsi que l'usage des procès"; réponse de Pierre-François Rose le 14 juillet 1845, p.177.

<sup>106</sup> See Yves Castan, "Mentalités rurale et urbaine à la fin de l'ancien régime dans le ressort du Parlement de Toulouse d'après les sacs à procès criminels, 1730-1790", dans *Crimes et criminalité en France sous l'Ancien régime, XVII<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1971), pp. 109-86, and Robert Muchembled, *La Violence au Village: Sociabilité et comportements populaires en Artois du XV<sup>e</sup> au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Belgique, 1989).

<sup>107</sup> Goubert, *French Peasantry*, p. 3; Menon and Lecotté, *Au village de France*, p. 132; Rocal, *Vieux Périgord*, pp. 225-6. The fact that a considerable journey was often undertaken by peasants in order to go to and from a market town is often cited by local authorities in an attempt to convince the government to attend to bad road conditions. In 1792, for example, the municipality of Sos (department of Lot-et-Garonne) petitioned the district authorities to send an engineer to bear witness to the terrible roads, since the weekly market was the "entrepôt de toute la lande"; A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, L719, Registre des délibérations du district de Nérac, 20 janvier 1792, fol.102v-103r. In the Dordogne, similarly, the author of a departmental almanac published in Year XI condemned the local roads, "dont la dégradation interrompt les relations des communes et porte un préjudice infini à leurs foires et marchés." (Secrétaire général de la Préfecture, *Annuaire du département de la Dordogne, pour l'année sextile XI*. Périgueux: an XI, A.D. Dordogne, rayon ouvert 01/7).



authorities.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, at the market or fair itself, discussions would inevitably take place among producers from different villages, while selling their wares, availing themselves of the professional and artisanal services of the town, or taking a drink in the cabaret at the end of the day. The cleric Georges Rocal, in an account of his native Périgord in the nineteenth century, describes how even if peasants had little to sell, they would find an excuse to attend the fair, in order to mingle with others and “s’informer au hasard des rencontres”:

Il saura les potins, les faits-divers dont l'importance l'emporte, pour lui, sur les grandioses événements qui décident de la destinée des peuples. Il entendra les premières rumeurs qui, amplifiées, créent l'opinion. Il recevra d'une voix anonyme, non point des raisons, mais des conclusions. Sur ces directives, parties on ne sait d'où, auxquelles ses oreilles reconnaîtront une réalité indiscutable, il jugera les hommes, il votera, il se mettra à l'unisson de ses compatriotes.<sup>109</sup>

Historian David Vassberg concurs, estimating that in early modern Spain, many rural folks attended markets even if they had no business to transact, as it “offered opportunities for social contacts with people from the extra-village world.”<sup>110</sup> For truly isolated communities, the market would have played an extremely important communication role; as Bahgat Elnadi and Adel Rifaat point out, speaking of the development of pre-industrial nations in general:

...le marché...était la seule occasion...de s'ouvrir par intermittences sur l'extérieur, d'entrer en contact avec d'autres, d'entrevoir une certaine diversité humaine. À la longue, il a favorisé la circulation des idées, l'innovation technique et la productivité du travail.<sup>111</sup>

The interaction and discussion which normally took place at the marketplace and on the fairground could have momentous significance in the realm of popular politics. Both news and rumours, for example, circulated much more quickly at such sites, propelled by the sheer force of a large gathering of people. The rumours of gathering armies and waiting brigands which characterised the Great Fear spread like wildfire upon reaching Piégut-Pluviers, in the northern tip of the department of the Dordogne, on 29 July 1789, as peasants from the surrounding area gathered in the small town for the weekly market.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, in the late autumn of 1793, the rumour that Jacques Lamartigne, a notary based in Cancon, had been discrediting the *assignats* was reported to have spread

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<sup>108</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L240, Tribunal correctionnel de Nérac, procès contre Parié Galet, laboureur, pour provocation à la désertion, messidor VII; witness no.1, Paul Laboubée.

<sup>109</sup> Rocal, *Vieux Périgord*, p. 218.

<sup>110</sup> Vassberg, *Village and the Outside World*, p. 27.

<sup>111</sup> Bahgat Elnadi and Adel Rifaat, “Le marché à travers les âges”, *Le Courrier de l'UNESCO*, 49 (1996), pp. 8-37, citation from p. 8.

<sup>112</sup> Bussière, *Études historiques*, t.3, pp. 94-6; Rocal, *Le Vieux Périgord*, p. 115.



quickly through the adjacent fairs of Casseneuil and Monclar (Lot-et-Garonne).<sup>113</sup> Although the scene remained relatively calm on both of these occasions, the same gathering of people might, with a sufficient catalyst, have decided to band together and rise up against the subject of their discontented conversations. Jean-Pierre Gutton has noted that markets and fairs were two of the primary centres of rural political activity across the early modern period; news was discussed and the idea of revolt might spread, as it had in the South-West in the seventeenth century,<sup>114</sup> an observation confirmed by the work of Yves-Marie Bercé in particular.<sup>115</sup>

Just as the traditional meeting-place of the market did not disappear with the Revolution,<sup>116</sup> neither did the potential for peasants to group together as a result of their discussions, giving the authorities cause for alarm. In early ventôse of Year V, for example, the police and municipal officers of the canton of Beaumont wrote to the local police brigade in Monpazier for additional reinforcement, as they felt that a counter-revolutionary insurrection had been threatening to erupt for some time. A great bonfire had been lit on the village square the previous evening, "sous prétexte louable de la jouissance de nos victoires et de la découverte de la nouvelle conspiration royaliste." The police were alarmed by the militant songs being sung in the street, and by the rumours which had led them to fear that the gathering crowds were in fact planning to rise up against the revolutionary government. The precise timing of their request for help, however, was due to the fact that the following day was a market day in the town; the police reasoned that the gathering of people from the surrounding villages might well act as a catalyst. This security measure, as well as additional precautions taken by the authorities, such as the closing of all cabarets and inns after nine in the evening, seems to have precluded any violence the following day, although the canton continued to be fraught with unease.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-9, Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire, procès contre Jacques Lamartigne, notaire, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires, germinal II.

<sup>114</sup> Gutton, *Sociabilité villageoise*, pp. 141, 237-8.

<sup>115</sup> Bercé, *History of Peasant Revolts*, pp. 20-39. See also Roland Mousnier, *Peasant Uprisings in Seventeenth-Century France, Russia and China*, trans. Brian Pearce (London, 1971); and Boris Porshnev, *Les Soulèvements populaires en France de 1623 à 1648* (Paris, 1963).

<sup>116</sup> On the number of markets and fairs in existence during the Revolution, see A.D. Ariège, 1L140; A.D. Dordogne, 1L424; A.D. Haute-Garonne, 1L555; A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 1L314; and A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 1L114.

<sup>117</sup> Later in the month, the same municipality again requested assistance: "Mardi prochain 24 du courant est un jour de foire dans cette commune assez réputée. Les avis que j'ai eu me font craindre que la rixe qui a eu lieu le jour de la dernière foire de Monpazier entre des habitants des deux communes circonvoisines, ne doive se continuer, à Beaumont mardi prochain. ...[j'aimerais] vous prévenir [de] venir avec votre brigade pour maintenir l'ordre qui doit regner dans cette foire...". A.D. Dordogne, 1L70, pièce 249, 22



One issue clearly emerges from the depiction of markets and fairs, or indeed any place of meeting, as the brewing-grounds for revolt: the role of the surroundings themselves as the object of subversive activity. That is, were the disturbances which took place at markets and fairs uniquely concerned with the economic exchange itself? Jack Thomas, in his study of markets and fairs in the region around Toulouse, has suggested a categorisation of political conflicts which occurred in the marketplace according to their motivation.<sup>118</sup> In a certain number of cases, the economic circumstances were, indeed, the subject of the dispute, as peasants contested the price or scarcity of grain, the behaviour of the town authorities, or perhaps the date of the market itself. This sort of disturbance was common under the *ancien régime*, and only intensified with the greater regulation imposed by the Revolution.<sup>119</sup> The scarcity resulting from poor harvests was exacerbated by political conflict, lending an uneasy atmosphere to the grain trade. The introduction of the law of the Maximum on 4 May 1793, which attempted to regulate prices, became an additional context for revolt, as did the constant requisitioning of grain for the armies and cities.<sup>120</sup> Bryant T. Ragan, for example, has shown how the need to provision the departmental capital of Amiens became a political issue for the peasants of the Somme.<sup>121</sup> The issue of rescheduling traditional market and fair days according to the new republican calendar also provoked disturbances, causing, as Matt Shaw has explained, a disruption in both the religious rhythms and the patterns of commerce in rural areas.<sup>122</sup>

However, marketplaces and fairgrounds also came to play a role as arenas for political discussion and contestation which had little to do with economic activity. In such circumstances, as Thomas has remarked, the gathering functioned “comme caisse de résonance dans une société où la communication est restée très largement une affaire de

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ventôse anV, lettre manuscrit de l'administration cantonale de Beaumont au Brigadier en résidence à Monpazier.

<sup>118</sup> Thomas, *Le Temps des foires*, pp. 199-255.

<sup>119</sup> On the *ancien régime*, see Nicolas, *Rébellion française*, pp. 180-2.

<sup>120</sup> Discussions of the maximum and other economic issues will be studied in more detail in chapter III.

<sup>121</sup> Bryant T. Ragan, “Rural Political Culture in the Department of the Somme during the French Revolution”, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1988, pp. 108-48.

<sup>122</sup> Matthew Shaw, “Time and the French Revolution, 1789-Year XIV”, Unpublished D.Phil. Dissertation, University of York, U.K., 2000, chapter 6, “Work Time”, pp. 180-222; see especially pp. 186-90, 195-98. Although a considerable number of disturbances resulted from the imposition of the calendar, Shaw reminds us that peasants often took advantage of the disruption to establish a greater number of fairs than had previously existed. See also Margairaz, *Foires et marchés*, pp. 164-6, and Thomas, *Le Temps des Foires*, pp. 201-16. Two articles by local historians also provide colourful regional illustrations: see M.P. Préneron, “Troubles au marché de Seissan sous le Directoire”, *Bulletin de la Société archéologique, historique, littéraire et scientifique du Gers*, 47 (1947), pp. 140-3, and Jeanne Grall, “Les foires de Caen pendant la période révolutionnaire”, *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie*, 57 (1963-64), pp. 525-38.



contacts humains directs."<sup>123</sup> Nineteenth-century historians in particular have closely examined the importance of markets and fairs in the campaigning of socialist historians for the rural vote in 1848-51.<sup>124</sup> Leo Loubère describes how such a scene might have played out:

...before modern communication appeared life was centered in the cantonal capitals or larger communes, for the big city was impossibly far away. [...] Even a small locality's social structure, therefore, was complex with its complement of small merchants, medical doctor, pharmacist, notary, justice of the peace, artisans, and, above all, *café* owners, who were numerous in the hills and plains. Many of the daily activities and political interests involving local affairs were centered in the *café*. ... The *café* was, above all, a link between town and country. On market days peasants gathered there and listened to Republican propaganda spread by a freethinking doctor or pharmacist, an ideological lawyer or notary who might or might not have political ambitions. Their activities made the *café* the hostile counterpart of the parish church where the *curé* spread Legitimist ideals.<sup>125</sup>

Although this account focusses on the role of educated intermediaries as sources of information, the speaker in the *café* could just as easily have been an artisan or an agricultural labourer, for less-informed speech could make an impression as well. As Loubère makes clear, however, despite the fact that markets and fairs provided the economic incentive for the gathering, the political discussions and arguments were more likely to occur in the places adjacent to the grounds themselves, such as the shops of artisans and professionals and, particularly, the drinking establishments which flanked any such attractions. Thus, it is to these places of meeting that we now turn.

### Cabarets, inns and taverns

By nature places of relaxation, meeting and discussion, the cabarets, inns and taverns of rural eighteenth-century France were some of the primary venues of informal contact and communication. Although one was certain to find several such establishments in every market town or large agglomeration, the cabaret was not solely an urban phenomenon: Pierre Goubert, for example, confirms for the seventeenth century that there was "at least one *cabaret* in each village of any size" which sold that year's local wine, usually red, "from the barrel, by the jug, or by the pint."<sup>126</sup> In his study of pre-revolutionary sociability in Provence, Maurice Agulhon arrives at a similar conclusion,

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<sup>123</sup> Thomas, *Le Temps des foires*, p. 254.

<sup>124</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 243-50; McPhee, *Politics of Rural Life*, and Margadant, *French Peasants in Revolt*, esp. pp. 337-42.

<sup>125</sup> Leo A. Loubère, "The Emergence of the Extreme Left in Lower Languedoc, 1848-1851: Social and Economic Factors in Politics", *American Historical Review*, 73 (1968), pp. 1019-51; citation is from p. 1025. The term *café* is of relatively recent coinage, and, as in this passage, is connected with urban centres and newspaper reading.

<sup>126</sup> Goubert, *French Peasantry*, p. 136.



observing that while the occasional non-commercial agglomeration or extremely isolated hamlet might lack an official drinking establishment, the vast majority of villages, even if small and far from the major roads, were nevertheless well-equipped.<sup>127</sup> In the area around Annecy in Savoy, as the Bishop Biord wrote to the king in 1765, there were cabarets everywhere, “même dans les paroisses où il n’y en avait point auparavant; on en a établi dans les hameaux les plus écartés, et dans les endroits les plus éloignés des grandes routes.”<sup>128</sup> Pierre Rascol noted the surprising number of cabarets in the eighteenth-century Albigeois,<sup>129</sup> and Jean Nicolas’ attempt at a global statistic – 80,000 taverns in Louis XIV’s France, or approximately one for each 250 inhabitants – is possibly shy of the actual number.<sup>130</sup>

In addition to the provision of victuals and spirits, such establishments were necessary for the accommodation of passing guests, although if no inns were available in a village, it was not uncommon for passers-by to ask at farmhouses if they could stay for the night. Rose Marres, the wife of a *cultivateur* living in the tiny hamlet of Ambrus, in the Lot-et-Garonne, recounted to the police in 1797 how several months previously, as she had been about to go to bed one evening, five strangers appeared at her door asking if she could accommodate them for the night.<sup>131</sup> Not wanting to be fined for holding an inn without proper authorisation, Rose was decidedly circumspect as she explained that she invited them in, “quoiqu’elle ne fasse pas auberge, mais elle donne quelques fois à manger et à boire à ceux qui passent et qui en demandent, de ses fonds et revenus.” Such descriptions, however, are relatively rare, and it was likely that most villages on any kind of thoroughfare would have had either an inn or a tavern-keeper to whom travellers could turn for shelter.<sup>132</sup>

Indeed, economic documents such as the capitation rolls used by Agulhon and the lists of *patentes*, or trading licences, required from 1791 onwards, tend to underestimate the number of “informal” inns and taverns. This was true particularly of rural areas,

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<sup>127</sup> Agulhon remarks that “quelle que soit la circulation, à pied ou à cheval, des charretiers, muletiers, bergers, colporteurs...,” even one inn “seems a lot” for the hamlet of Beaudinard (population 326); Agulhon, *Pénitents et francs-maçons de l’ancienne Provence* (Paris, 1968), pp. 242-3.

<sup>128</sup> Archives du séminaire d’Annecy, Mémoires de Mgr Biord, p. 33-34, lettre au roi, 7 février 1765; cited in Jean Nicolas, “Cabarets et sociabilité populaire en Savoie au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Les Intermédiaires culturels*, (see note 155, below), pp. 305-21, citation p. 307.

<sup>129</sup> *Paysans de l’Albigeois*, pp. 182-3.

<sup>130</sup> Jean Nicolas, “Le tavernier, le juge et le curé”, *Histoire*, 25 (1980), pp.20-28; citation, p. 20.

<sup>131</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L236-87, Tribunal correctionnel de Nérac, procès contre François Lafon, tailleur de pierre, pour assassinat, pluviôse V. Rose Marres, wife of Arnaud Laverni, *cultivateur*, was the eleventh witness.

<sup>132</sup> Bercé, *Vie quotidienne dans l’Aquitaine*, chapter 2.



where small businesses could easily escape the official gaze, and thus the required taxes. When the demand for refreshment was high, such as during harvest time, a local fair or the festival of the patron-saint of the village, certain individuals, particularly vine-growers, would open "part-time" taverns, affixing a "bush", or fir branch, over their door as an indication.<sup>133</sup> In addition, certain artisans such as bakers, blacksmiths and cobblers would sell alcohol in their shops, or in a neighbouring room, in order to supplement their income, thus giving clients a further reason to stop and socialise.<sup>134</sup> One day in August 1793, for example, two *cultivateurs* living near the borough of Monflanquin (Lot-et-Garonne) came into town, each to avail himself of the services of some of the many artisans whose workshops were located there. While visiting the shoemaker, whose shop also doubled as a *cabaret* and *auberge*, they stopped to have a drink, and found themselves overhearing Joseph Delrieu, a cook living near Monflanquin, who was ranting about the worthlessness of *assignats*.<sup>135</sup> The continuity between work and sociability in rural France created the conditions in which rural inhabitants, on a day-to-day basis, were exposed to news and interaction. The very vagueness with which administrative texts refer to drinking establishments, such as "les aubergistes et cabaretiers du bourg" and "chez les débitants de boissons," underlines the degree to which such gathering-places were well-established village institutions.

Much of our specific knowledge of the activities which occurred in such places is gleaned from the records of their regulation and policing. Some such controls were fiscal in origin, as all alcoholic drinks were heavily taxed by the monarchy, and in wine-producing areas, controls were established regarding the area from which a merchant could purchase wine for sale and the date after which he could begin to serve it. Increasingly in the eighteenth century, there was a concern with the standardisation of the measures used by innkeepers and cabaret-owners when selling wine, and municipalities were expected to visit every *débiteur de boissons* to verify the bottles being used and to

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<sup>133</sup> Bercé, *History of Peasant Revolts*, p. 34; Goubert, *French Peasantry*, p. 137. Departmental archives give numerous indications that this sort of occurrence was commonplace. To cite just one example, a number of individuals in the village of Corgnac, in the Dordogne, were both "aubergistes" and "boulangers". A.D. Dordogne, Edep460 Corgnac, 27 mars 1790.

<sup>134</sup> See in particular Nicolas, "Cabarets", p. 310. Nicolas describes such shops, "tous endroits où l'on vient quotidiennement pour ses besoins élémentaires, et où l'on stationne en attendant la journée ou l'achèvement de l'ouvrage..."

<sup>135</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L50-1 and 2L98-29, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Joseph Delrieu, cuisinier, pour paroles démoralisants au sujet de la monnaie, août 1793 - pluviôse II. Jean Faux and Antoine Teyssier, *cultivateurs*, were witnesses no. 6 and 7 respectively.



certify them with an official seal.<sup>136</sup> In the village of Coubjours (Dordogne), with three inns for only 450 inhabitants, for example, the municipal officers found “some bottles which were too big and others which were too small” at the inn of Bertrand Feinignac.<sup>137</sup> In other instances, the verification process brought different problems to light, as in the market town of St.Pastour, where the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law of one absent innkeeper fired “rude remarks” at the government representative who told them that said innkeeper would require an authorisation from the municipality to continue lodging travellers.<sup>138</sup> Even when the verification of the economic sanctions on inns and cabarets itself proved uneventful, the administrative process still allows us to glimpse the role played by such drinking-houses in the rural economy.

Cabarets, inns and taverns were also regulated because of their reputation as places which encouraged gambling, drunkenness and violent brawls.<sup>139</sup> Attempts to control such activities through authorisations and licenses, such as those mentioned above, date back to the middle ages. In addition, local authorities endeavoured to enforce the closing time of nine in the evening, to prevent intoxicated, boisterous groups from spilling into the streets late at night, singing “chansons dissolues”, throwing stones at doors and windows, beating drums, and generally disturbing the “repos public”.<sup>140</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century, police visits were undertaken regularly to ensure that no gambling was taking place, that the wine served was not “foreign”, and that there was no scandalous singing or tumultuous dancing.<sup>141</sup> The advent of the Revolution did not alter either the behaviour in drinking-houses or the policing of them, and the sudden multiplication of references to such issues bears witness more to a new preoccupation with record-keeping than with a change in rural behaviour.

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<sup>136</sup> This type of regulation, which had been enforced periodically in earlier centuries, became more common with the eighteenth-century emphasis on improving transportation and commerce, anticipating the standardisation of weights and measures introduced by the National Assembly in May 1790. See Francisque Michel and Edouard Fournier, *Histoire des hôtelleries, cabarets, hotels garnis, restaurants et cafés et des anciennes communautés et confréries d'hôteliers, de marchands de vins, de restaurateurs, de limonadiers, etc., etc.* (2 vols., Paris, 1851); vol.2 p. 295 and *passim*.

<sup>137</sup> A.D. Dordogne, Edep471, Registre du conseil municipal de Coubjours; entry for 10 April 1790.

<sup>138</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Edep St Pastour 1D1, Registre du conseil municipal, entry for 24 December 1792.

<sup>139</sup> Michel and Fournier, *Histoire des hôtelleries*.

<sup>140</sup> Agulhon, *Pénitents*, p. 242. See also Thomas Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, 1988), and David Andress, *The Massacre at the Champ-de-Mars: Popular Dissent and Political Culture in the French Revolution* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000).

<sup>141</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Edep 2084-2085 (Clairac), 2710 (Moncrabeau), 48 (Astaffort), 1709 (Ste-Bazeille). The pre-revolutionary communal archives attesting to this constant police effort generally exist only for larger towns and administrative centres. However, given the evidence provided by secondary sources of the existence of inns and cabarets in the countryside, as well as that provided in similar situations during the Revolution, we might extrapolate that the situation was not dissimilar in the villages.



Even louder in protesting these scenes of licentiousness and debauchery were the parish priests, who saw them as a perpetual danger to traditional values and to civic order. Along with early closure and prohibition of gambling, the most commonly cited restrictions imposed upon cabarets were those of enforced closure during religious services, and of not serving food to residents of the parish outside of the evening meal, particularly on Sundays, presumably with the aim of preventing lengthy stays. The main cabaret was usually located on the village square, near the church; one historian has observed that it was "well-placed to receive the parishioners as they came out of Mass" or after playing games on the square in the afternoon.<sup>142</sup> As Gabriel Le Bras attests:

Le cabaretier était, sous l'ancien régime, l'anti-curé du village. Il avait le même public, les mêmes heures d'ouverture le dimanche et il retenait ses clients pendant les offices... Malgré la sévérité des lois civiles et canoniques, le cabaret a été dans l'ancienne France une contre-Eglise. Cette fonction il ne l'a point tout à fait perdue au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle...<sup>143</sup>

In spite of the strictness of the laws, as underlined by Le Bras, their application in isolated rural parishes remained largely dependent upon the character and opinion of the syndics and of the priest. In the village of St-Nicolas-la-Chapelle, in northern Savoy, the *curé* noted with tolerance that on fair days, entire families would go to the cabaret, dressed up, each individual with a few coins of his or her own, eager to "faire comme la ville".<sup>144</sup> Such an attitude was not uncommon, in fact; folklorists Pierre-Louis Menon and Roger Lecotté describe how in many regions, several hours spent in the cabaret could be considered a special treat and not the least bit dishonourable:

Dimanche...on se 'reblanchit', on cire ses souliers et l'on va au cabaret... c'est un lieu de réunion où l'on ne distingue ni riches ni pauvres, tout le monde se parle; d'ailleurs, tout le monde peut aller librement chez les uns et les autres; tout le monde se connaît et s'estime.<sup>145</sup>

Nevertheless, it was far more common for the parish priest to speak angrily against the potential destruction of religious mores and family values which the cabaret or tavern represented.<sup>146</sup> Young people who went to the cabarets in pairs or groups were disapproved of, as were men whose excessive spending put their families' subsistence at risk. The priest of the small village of Vers (Savoy) reported that a cabaret existed in the

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<sup>142</sup> Goubert, *French Peasantry*, p. 137.

<sup>143</sup> Le Bras, *L'église et le village*, pp. 178-9. Jean Nicolas puts forward a very similar argument in "Le tavernier".

<sup>144</sup> Joisten and Devos, *Moeurs et coutumes*, p. 261. Response of Victor-Amédée Rey, priest at Saint-Nicolas-la-Chapelle (pop. 1034), 14 June 1845.

<sup>145</sup> Menon and Lecotté, *Au village de France*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>146</sup> Arlette Farge, "Familles. L'honneur et le secret", in Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (eds.), *Histoire de la vie privée, tome 3: De la Renaissance aux lumières* (Paris, 1986), pp. 574-6.



nearby hamlet of Bellossi, which served only to “démoraliser la jeunesse de la paroisse”, being neither authorised nor in a legitimate “lieu de passage”. The *syndics* of Vers, he complained, turned a blind eye to such abuses.<sup>147</sup>

It was not uncommon, however, for lay authorities to join forces with the parish priest in an attempt to control the potential disruption of local drinking houses. During a subsistence crisis in the Year II, for example, the municipality of Tournon (Lot-et-Garonne) identified rural cabarets as an unnecessary drain on important resources. In addition, the argument was brought to bear that in any case, “ils sont inutiles, servent encore à corrompre les mœurs, entretenir la débauche, et l'oisiveté, et troubler l'ordre public...”.<sup>148</sup> Although the municipality's main aim had been to restrict the cabarets and inns for police purposes, they chose to use similar rhetoric to that of the clerics, combining the arguments against waste and disorder with those against debauchery. The municipal council of the village of Galapian (Lot-et-Garonne) also supported the religious point of view when it seized an opportunity in 1791 to reiterate the police restrictions on cabarets, stating that the innkeepers and cabaret-owners were serving drinks during religious services, as well as remaining open past nine in the evening.<sup>149</sup>

Undeniably, such drinking places could easily become the theatre of immorality, as seen by secular and clerical authorities alike, and even of violent crimes and murder.<sup>150</sup> However, while most of the quarrels which erupted were personal in nature, such places also remained, in the eighteenth century and throughout the revolutionary period, a setting where contacts were made and news was shared. Even more than the open spaces of markets and fairs, these public drinking houses were the “lieu traditionnel de parole”, and more specifically, the “lieu privilégié de l'invective politique” of village society.<sup>151</sup> Researchers of densely populated rural areas in the early nineteenth century have emphasised the role of such meeting places in the evolution of a more “modern” form of

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<sup>147</sup> Devos and Joisten, *Moeurs et coutumes*, p. 219. The population of Vers at that time was 444.

<sup>148</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Edep Tournon (non-classifié), Délibérations du conseil municipal, deuxième registre, 25v-26r, 29 frimaire II.

<sup>149</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Edep Galapian, 1D1, Registre du conseil municipal, entry for 13 février 1791, pp. 42-4.

<sup>150</sup> Robert Muchembled, for example, in his research on early modern interpersonal violence in rural society, has established the importance of drinking places and socialisation rituals in the escalation of tension and conflict. See *La Violence au Village*, pp. 200-21, and “Pour une histoire des gestes (XV<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)”, *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 34 (1987), pp. 87-101. It was, of course, after the fair at Hauteffaye that a group of fairly drunk men attacked and killed a nobleman, creating a scandal which has been the focus of scholarly and popular interest alike; see Thomas, *Le Temps des foires*, p. 242, and Alain Corbin, *Le Village des cannibales* (Paris, 1995).

<sup>151</sup> Philippe Bourdin, “Les lieux de parole traditionnels et la Révolution”, *Bulletin historique et scientifique de l'Auvergne*, 94 (1988), pp. 207-17.



political sociability. Milan Vulic, for example, in his work on the bistros and cabarets of the coal basin of the departments of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais, has described them as an intersection of economic, social and political space, the “espace de la définition de la culture populaire”, in which worker solidarity first developed.<sup>152</sup> Maurice Agulhon, similarly, finds in rural cabarets the origins of the nineteenth-century “chambrées” of Provence, the equivalent of political clubs and associations among the popular classes. From the late eighteenth century, he writes, the “petit peuple...avait pris l’habitude de se réunir dans les cabarets et autres lieux publics...il commence à former des réunions régulières, pour la boisson, le jeu, le chant, le plaisir d’être ensemble, et à les consolider par une esquisse d’organisation...”.<sup>153</sup>

Thus, rural inns and cabarets represented a true focal point, where locals and peasants from the surrounding countryside could drink, play cards, and discuss various issues, and where those passing through could rest and relax. As implied by the findings of Agulhon and Vulic, the significance of this kind of meeting-place for communication about political events is tremendous, even for the eighteenth century and revolutionary era. Moreover, in spite of the fears of the authorities, tax revolts and popular *émotions* were more likely to start in outside meeting-places, and particularly near the focal point of popular dissatisfaction – such as land or grain – rather than to start in cabarets and taverns. Instead, the exchanges which took place were more the stuff of interpersonal conversation, either private, confidential discussions, or more spontaneous political outbursts, the latter both more likely to be overheard and, possibly, more revealing of the opinions of the speaker. In the course of any discussion, in fact, the subject could turn to matters of government, taxes, recruitment or grain requisitions, and the conversation would either be heartily joined or quietly observed by the fellow occupants of the room. Part of the explanation for such garrulousness, particularly when seditious, must lie with the alcohol: a carafe or two of strong red wine could embolden a tongue which might be kept quiet at the market, after church on the square, or during an electoral assembly. Equally important, however, was the fact that the inn or tavern represented a true place of meeting, in which peasants rubbed elbows with a wide variety of individuals. These drinking companions could be locals of a different walk of life – such as notaries or horse-salesmen – or strangers, including pedlars, soldiers and travellers. In both cases, such

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<sup>152</sup> Milan Vulic, “Le débit de boissons, le cabaret, le bistrot, dans le bassin houiller du Nord/Pas-de-Calais, témoins de la sociabilité populaire”, *Revue du Nord*, 70 (1988), pp. 771-87; see esp. pp. 773-74.

<sup>153</sup> Agulhon, *Pénitents*, p. 249.



individuals often acted as vectors of information.

### Individuals as Vectors of Information

#### Cultural intermediaries

The concept of the “cultural intermediary”, usually literate and more worldly than the peasant, as a conduit for the transfer of information is of relatively recent application in historical studies, and owes much to the work of cultural anthropologists in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>154</sup> It was first put forward in the context of French history at the conference *Les Intermédiaires Culturels* held at the University of Aix-en-Provence in 1978, where co-ordinator Michel Vovelle stressed its importance for the history of early modern and revolutionary France.<sup>155</sup> Although some historians have objected to the ‘trickle-down’, unidirectional transfer of information associated with the model of the cultural intermediary, in general, the idea has lent shape to a useful analytical tool and has encouraged a plethora of new studies.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, the phenomenon appears by no means to be restricted to France. Orlando Figes, in his study of communication during the Russian Revolution, attaches particular significance to the “rural intelligentsia”: the teachers, veterinarians, and doctors who “in former years had read the newspapers to the peasants, explained to them the meaning of the news, interpreted decrees, and acted as their scribes to the authorities.” When, in 1917, these individuals fled the countryside for the towns, the government was forced to send in “agitators”, “lectors” and “translators” to fill their role.<sup>157</sup>

The illustration of rural cabarets and inns as places of meeting makes the

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<sup>154</sup> See, for example, John Badgley, *Politics Among Burmans: A Study of Intermediary Leaders* (Athens, OH, 1970); Connor Bailey, *Broker, Mediator, Patron, and Kinsman: An Historical Analysis of Key Leadership Roles in a Rural Malaysian District* (Athens, OH, 1976); and Harik, “Opinion Leaders”. Also of note is the parallel concept of “culture brokers”, a role usually attributed to literate colonizers who made themselves the artificial elite of indigenous societies, and the exchange which occurred in such circumstances between the literate elite culture and the oral popular culture. See, for example, Clifford Geertz, “The Javanese Kijaji: The Changing Role of a Cultural Broker”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2 (1960), pp. 228-49, and Marshall Sahlins, “Cosmologies of Capitalism: The Trans-Pacific Sector of ‘The World System’”, in Nicolas B. Dirks, *et al.* (eds.), *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 412-55.

<sup>155</sup> *Les Intermédiaires culturels*, see especially Vovelle’s introduction to the volume, “Les Intermédiaires culturels: une problématique”, pp. 7-20.

<sup>156</sup> Among the numerous works which make good use of the concept, see McPhee, “Historians, Germs and Culture-Brokers”; Jacques Guilhaumou, “Le Porte-parole, figure centrale de la représentation politique pendant la Révolution française”, in N. Abou-Chedid Nasr, *et al.*, *Mentalités et représentations politiques: aspects de la recherche* (Roubaix, 1989), 91-8; and Jean Boutier, “Les courtiers locaux du politique, 1789-1792”, *A.h.R.f.*, 66 (1994), 401-11.

<sup>157</sup> Orlando Figes, “The Russian Revolution and Language in the Village”, *Russian Review*, 56 (1997), pp. 323-45, esp. pp. 328, 337.



Figure 1-1  
*Le curé patriote*



LE CURÉ PATRIOTE.

*Travaillez, mes enfans, obéissez aux lois,  
Je veillerai pour vous et défendrai vos droits.*

*se vend à Paris chez Desenne Imprimeur Libraire,  
au Palais Royal N° 1 et 2.*

*Paris 1790  
& chez l'Auteur, rue de l'Écluse-sec, maison de M. Monnot Notaire N° 11.*

Source: Frontispiece, *La Feuille villageoise*, adressée, chaque semaine, à tous les villages de la France, pour les instruire des lois, des événements, des découvertes qui intéressent tout citoyen; proposée par souscription aux propriétaires, fermiers, pasteurs, habitants et amis des campagnes... (Paris: Desenne, 30 septembre 1790-15 thermidor an III). B.N. 8°Lc² 463.



usefulness of the model of the cultural intermediary clear with respect to oral communication patterns. In the first place, the tavern-keeper himself was a key figure in the village, and would have known the gossip and news better than nearly any other individual; more often than not, he was counted among the witnesses even in cases which did not take place in his own presence, for the information which he might have picked up subsequently.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, it was part of the host's or hostess' acknowledged role to "faire circuler la parole"<sup>159</sup>, not unlike the female *salonnières* of more urban settings. Jean-Pierre Gutton has called them the "dépositaires des solidarités du lieu", and it is not unreasonable to suggest that it was in his role of informer, counsellor, and monitor of village goings-on that the parish priest might have felt somewhat displaced by these secular advisors.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, the local cabaret or inn was the natural locale to fix a rendez-vous, whether secretive and seditious (such as an arrangement between smugglers), or entirely official, particularly in those places which were large enough to offer the privacy of a separate back room.<sup>161</sup> Pierre Goubert's assertion that the back room of the tavern often served as a meeting-room for the municipal council in the seventeenth century is borne out by numerous references in the municipal archives to localities which, in the late eighteenth century, were still too small to be able to afford a separate *maison commune*.<sup>162</sup> Business meetings might also take place there; Jacques Lamartigne, for example, a notary in the Lot-et-Garonne, would travel regularly to the fairs at Castillonès and Monclar, among others, setting up his practice for the day in the back room of a local inn.<sup>163</sup> Tax-collectors and officials of the seigneurial court would also make use of a cabaret or tavern, as would military recruiters, these last possibly paying the drinking tab

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<sup>158</sup> Emmet Kennedy has remarked upon how cabaret keepers, among others, "had frequent opportunity to listen to what others were saying", and in at least two of the seditious speech trials examined in the course of this study, there is evidence that the *aubergiste* was actively spreading news. See Kennedy, *Cultural History*, p. 313; A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Rajade *plus jeune*, abbé, pour discours contre-révolutionnaires, germinal IV, witness 15; and A.D. Ariège, 1J305, procès-verbal de police au sujet d'un placard séditieux, Pamiers, décembre 1788.

<sup>159</sup> The expression is that of Nicolas, "Le tavernier", p. 20.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311; Gutton, *Sociabilité villageoise*, p. 141.

<sup>161</sup> Nicolas, "Cabarets", pp. 314-5.

<sup>162</sup> Goubert, *French Peasantry*, pp. 137-8. In germinal of Year II, in the commune of Monbahu (population 1027, department of Lot-et-Garonne), the conseil municipal paid a bill of 80 *livres* to the citoyenne Prunet, aubergiste, for having provided them with a room in which to hold their meetings for the previous eighteen months; see A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Edep Monbahu 1D1, Registre du conseil municipal, entry for 3 germinal II. The municipal council of Montesquieu (population 1609, department of Lot-et-Garonne), also met at the local drinking-house: the inn of the widow Belot. See A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L443, Liasse de police du juge de paix, canton de Bruch, investigation of the report that Pierre Sauvage, *valet de ville*, had disturbed *l'ordre public*, 29 janvier 1792.

<sup>163</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-9, procès contre Lamartigne, germinal II. The reader is reminded that while multiple references to the same trial documents have been abbreviated, a table detailing all trials in the sample used for this study can be found in Appendix B.



of those who would provide them with names.<sup>164</sup>

The presence of outsiders, whether from another village, the nearest town, or further afield, could also introduce new variables into the regular Sunday-afternoon conversation. This element was particularly significant in the case of rural taverns which offered accommodation to travellers as well as refreshment, and in villages which were situated on or near a crossroads or important road.<sup>165</sup> Within a relatively restricted radius, many people in eighteenth-century rural France moved around a great deal, for a wide variety of reasons. Such individuals would not only be more informed in their opinions than the average peasant, but they would also bring news and descriptions from places further afield than the local market town. Interrogations from conflicts which occurred in cabarets, taverns and inns invariably reveal the presence of such figures as notaries or horse-dealers, whose profession required them to travel frequently in rural areas. Into the same category fall messengers and carters, who would need to stop to rest, make deliveries and feed and water their animals, as well as the *piétons municipaux* and *valets de ville*, on their way to or from the nearest post office. Here, too, there is perhaps a distinction to be drawn between the roadside inn, which would represent a staging post for carters and travellers moving with wheeled transport, and the village cabaret, where one might more likely meet those on foot or leading a packhorse or mule.<sup>166</sup> Soldiers, finally, stand out as a group very heavily represented among the outsiders found in drinking houses, and often constituted the most boisterous and politically opinionated of the lot.

Although the general abundance of outsiders in rural cabarets and inns could easily result in news and ideas being brought from beyond the canton, itinerant merchants in particular were almost certain to come bearing information, as well as goods for trade. According to one description of rural cabarets in the late seventeenth century, the clientele commonly included, apart from "la partie masculine adulte du village", storytellers and pedlars come from afar:

Les 'nouvellistes'...recueillent et répandent les avis, informations, ragots et 'canards' divers, venus de la ville où du bourg. Les colporteurs, que l'on nomme au

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<sup>164</sup> Goubert, *French Peasantry*, p. 138; Bercé, *History of Peasant Revolts*, p. 35.

<sup>165</sup> Barbara Karsky studied one New England farm house that was "frequently a stopover place for travellers or for people wandering in search of work and shelter", because it was situated on a major thoroughfare; see Karsky, "Sociability," p. 45. For early modern Spain, similarly, David Vassberg describes how many inns were situated along the roads, rather than in the villages, because many travellers were on foot, and would cover short, irregular distances. Vassberg, *Village and the Outside World*, p. 131.

<sup>166</sup> This observation has been made both by Nicolas, "Cabarets", p. 307, and Agulhon, *Pénitents*, p. 243. *Hôtels garnis* and *auberges* which were in or near larger centres were also likely to house a certain population of fairly transient individuals who had lived there for months or even years; see Andress, *Massacre*, *passim*.



XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle 'merciers de campagne', ne sont pas les derniers à informer le manant...<sup>167</sup>

The mention of "nouvellistes", a sort of news-gatherer and Rambler who might also write pamphlets or news articles, is somewhat curious; one would be more likely to expect the presence of such a character in Paris or the larger towns. However, rather than the actual profession, the term might have been used to describe those passers-by who simply told stories. Writing about rural inns in Haute-Savoie, for example, Jean Nicolas describes how "les émigrants qui se 'repatrient de Pary' arborent la cocarde, 'dogmatisent' et font 'les nouvelles', surtout les jours de foire et de marché."<sup>168</sup> Like messengers, such travellers would bear news from the outside world, which their rural companions would have hungrily consumed.

The presence of pedlars, however, or *colporteurs*, deserves to be treated in more detail. Much of the research undertaken on pedlars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has focussed upon the provincial book trade, rightly underlining the significant role played by these figures in the distribution of written material.<sup>169</sup> However, alongside these perhaps more specialised pedlars, and existing far earlier than they, was the more generic sort of travelling salesman, who would pass periodically through the village with his chest of household items, clothing, and trinkets, including religious images and icons. The presence of these outsiders throughout Europe in this period is a given, as is the principle that along with needles, ribbon and metal pots, they also brought news and ideas from the outside world. Writing of early modern rural Castile, for example, David Vassberg describes the "itinerant vendors" who travelled the roads, "periodically visiting all but the most isolated areas", and offering not only goods, but also "a window on the wider world for isolated rural people."<sup>170</sup> Similarly, Vivian Gruder, in appraising rural awareness of the political ideas circulating immediately prior to the Revolution, takes into account the assumption that merchants and pedlars "regularly passed through the countryside carrying news of what was happening beyond the confines of the town or

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<sup>167</sup> François Bluche, *La vie quotidienne au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1984), p. 328.

<sup>168</sup> Nicolas, "Cabarets", p. 315.

<sup>169</sup> Robert Darnton, "Philosophy under the Cloak", in Darnton and Roche (eds.), *Revolution in Print*, pp. 27-49, and *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, among other works; Roger Chartier and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, *Colportage et lecture populaire, imprimés de large circulation en Europe XVI<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1996); Lise Andries, *Le Grand livre des secrets: le colportage en France aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1994); and B. Maradan, "Chamagne et les Chamagnons: Colporteurs en livres", in *Intermédiaires culturels*, pp. 277-89. Laurence Fontaine, in her remarkably detailed work on pedlars throughout Europe, comments upon how much more problematic it is to trace the non-printed objects sold by pedlars; Laurence Fontaine, *History of Pedlars in Europe*, trans. Vicki Whittaker (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 186-8.

<sup>170</sup> Vassberg, *Village and the Outside World*, p. 34.

village.”<sup>171</sup> In general, the somewhat sparse references to such daily word-of-mouth communication in the archive can be taken to represent a much more widespread phenomenon.

Although pedlars on foot were commonly seen in the village, and thus were likely at the village cabaret as well, those with horse and wagon would be largely confined to the main roads like the carters, and would come into contact with peasants chiefly at fairs or inns along their journey.<sup>172</sup> Itinerant salesmen, performers and miracle-workers certainly figured among the primary attractions of the fairground in the popular imagination,<sup>173</sup> and there is plenty of evidence to suggest that pedlars did indeed include the periodic fairs in their itinerary.<sup>174</sup> Yet for all that village housewives might have looked forward to the passage of a familiar *colporteur*, the pedlar remained on the fringes of village society. Laurence Fontaine has observed an ambiguous relationship between travelling merchants and rural communities, where the former permitted purchases on credit, allowing his peasant clients to go into debt so that they became dependent upon his return, to the disadvantage and consequent resentment of resident merchants in the towns, from whom they could no longer afford to purchase goods.<sup>175</sup> Regardless of how familiar a sight pedlars became in the villages, the authorities continued to mistrust them. Any outsider could be used as a scapegoat, and a pedlar who had recently moved on could easily be blamed for a theft or an unexplainable fire. Richard Cobb has described how itinerant citizens, no matter how poor, were hassled by the police as “potential sources of sedition”, regardless of their worth to village society, and pedlars commonly figured on the list of “usual suspects”.<sup>176</sup>

Yet despite their presence at rural fairs and in drinking houses, the *colporteur* barely makes an appearance in the many documented cases of seditious speech or the

<sup>171</sup> Gruder, “Can we hear the voices”, p. 168.

<sup>172</sup> Lise Andries, *Colporter la Révolution: catalogue publié à l'occasion de l'exposition du 10 avril au 12 mai 1989* (Montreuil, 1989), p. 22.

<sup>173</sup> See, for example, Rocal, *Le Vieux Périgord*, pp. 218, 224-5; J.J. Jusserand, *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages* (London, 1925), pp. 223-53; and Youri Messen-Jaschin, et al., *Le Monde des Forains du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Lausanne, 1986).

<sup>174</sup> Dominique Magairaz has suggested that the universal presence of pedlars at fairs was less a reality than a popular idea; see *Foires et marchés*, p. 205. Although it is true that most of the tables of markets and fairs prepared during the Revolution indicated only livestock amongst the objects sold, it is unlikely that municipal authorities would have thought it logical to include merchants on whom they did not depend, and who were unlikely to require a stall. In her research on the “petty chapmen” of England, Margaret Spufford has demonstrated that some pedlars travelled up to 75 miles or more to include a fair in their tour, at times being taken for vagrants by the police authorities: *The Great Reclothing of Rural England* (London, 1984), pp. 74-6. See also, finally, Jack Thomas, *Temps des foires*, pp. 322ff.

<sup>175</sup> Fontaine, *History of Pedlars*, pp. 29-31, 165-6.

<sup>176</sup> Cobb, *Police and the People*, pp. 17-37.



spreading of anti-Republican information during the Revolution. One potential explanation lies in the fact that as habitual suspects, pedlars might have been particularly circumspect when speaking in public, and were probably careful not to be overheard saying anything which might warrant their arrest. On the other hand, perhaps it is merely a question of numbers: Jusserand, in his late nineteenth-century treatise on "wayfarers" in medieval and early modern England, suggested that the far greater presence of wayfarers in England meant that news of peasant riots spread more quickly and allowed a unified effort, as opposed to the isolated and easily-repressed *jacqueries* in France.<sup>177</sup> A third possibility, at least for the revolutionary era, lies in the particular form of political paranoia which characterised the later governments, an issue which will be dealt with further in chapter IV. Authorities were unlikely to see a simple messenger, such as a poor pedlar, as an agent of counter-revolution, preferring to look for the 'true culprit', who would surely be a much more formidable enemy. When a subversive tract was discovered, authorities occasionally mentioned the desire to discover the "*colporteur*" who had brought it, such as in thermidor of Year VII, when a royalist tract attributed to the Prince de Condé was discovered in Agen (Lot-et-Garonne).<sup>178</sup> Similarly, the departmental authorities of the Dordogne had been concerned a year earlier with an illicit treatise on elections circulating in the countryside, and had ordered local police to attempt to apprehend the "*distributeurs et colporteurs*".<sup>179</sup> However, even in these examples it is unlikely that the municipalities expected an itinerant merchant with a case on his back to have delivered the pamphlet as part of a plan to spread sedition. In these as in other instances, it was assumed that the culprit was an ill-intentioned author who wished to sow ideas which were hostile to the government.

### The role of gender in verbal communication patterns

Before leaving this introduction to the sites and conduits of rural sociability, it is important to remark upon the role of gender, both in structuring the various arenas of rural communication, and as a filter which could affect how that communication itself was perceived. Social historians of rural France are well aware that in the eighteenth-century

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<sup>177</sup> Jusserand, *English Wayfaring*, pp. 277-8.

<sup>178</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Edep Agen 2 I 12, Extrait des registres de l'administration municipale de la ville d'Agen; procès-verbal relatif à un manifeste contre-révolutionnaire de la part du prince Condé, 2 thermidor VII.

<sup>179</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 1L396, Surveillance de la presse et du courrier, Circulaire imprimé de l'Administration du département aux administrations municipales des communes et cantons, 4 germinal VI.

village, each area of work and sociability was demarcated as the domain of either men or women, corresponding, as Martine Segalen writes, "to the sexual segregation of territories in the house and in the village."<sup>180</sup> The hearth and home, as well as the immediate courtyard, was naturally a female space; women were responsible for the cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing, as well as the gardening and the raising of small animals. In contrast, the workshops and fields were the place of male labour, except during periods of intense work, such as the harvest, which would require the help of the entire family. Secondary work locations were also closely associated with gender: thus the washing-place (*lavoir*) was the women's domain, whereas the blacksmith's shop and the wine cellars were dominated by the men.

Within the public area of the village, the division of space is perhaps less self-evident. In the church, for example, the chancel and the choir loft were reserved for the menfolk, whereas the women would occupy the nave and the side chapels. The central square was considered the domain of the men – the daily exchange of news there would have been a male activity – and although women passed through the square on one errand or another, they would not stop to chat unless it was a market day.<sup>181</sup> The maleness of the space of the public square would have been amplified in villages where there was an *halle* or covered market, especially if the meeting room of the municipal council was located in the space over the market.<sup>182</sup> Other divisions of space within rural society were equally connected to the gendered nature of their related activities. Since it was the women who raised the chickens, milked the cows, and tended the gardens, it was therefore the woman's role to take the eggs, poultry, milk, cheese, and produce to the market.<sup>183</sup> By contrast, the less-frequent fairs were largely a male domain, as the primary commodity was livestock. The public drinking-houses – including inns, taverns, cabarets, and, later, cafés – were not only a male space, but were closely linked with male activities such as fair-going,

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<sup>180</sup> Martine Segalen, *Love and Power in the Peasant Family: Rural France in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 150-1.

<sup>181</sup> Lucienne Roubin, "Male and Female Space Within the Provençal Community," trans. Patrica M. Ranum, in Orest Ranum and Robert Forster (eds.), *Rural Society in France* (Baltimore, 1977), pp. 152-80; citation p. 154.

<sup>182</sup> Anthropologist Rayna Reiter, in particular, has emphasised the degree to which the division of space in the French village is connected to the separation of private (female) and public (male) forms of sociability. While men are constantly in contact with outsiders, women see their sphere of activity in terms of kinship or, at the most, solidarity with other women of the same village. Reiter, "Men and Women".

<sup>183</sup> This is one distinction which may change over time and in different regions of France. Reiter describes how men typically attend the weekly market, visiting and drinking with business partners or colleagues; when women attend, on the other hand, they tend to stick together, not feeling any solidarity with women of other villages. To some extent this is borne out in the documentation of the revolutionary era: although women tend to be dominant in numbers at the marketplace, men are indeed present, and figure more prominently in incidents where communication is concerned. "Men and Women", pp. 254-5.



discussion on the square, and the playing of various games.<sup>184</sup> The corresponding link of women to the economic marketplace was also connected to their exclusion from this male domain, as they would not normally have been found drinking or socialising near the public square.<sup>185</sup>

The fact that the public space at the centre of the village was a male area of interaction tended to work towards the exclusion of women from the political arena.<sup>186</sup> The contribution of women was relegated to their traditional spheres of influence – the church and the marketplace – and their ideas on political topics of interest to them, such as the reading of laws after Mass, the circulation of grain, and the possibility of financial ruin brought by the *assignats*, were largely discounted as the “excitations de quelques femmes égarées”.<sup>187</sup> In their quaint, retrospective account of village life, ethnographers Menon and Lecotté describe how gendered places of work became spheres of discussion for both men and women. At the washing-place, they write,

“...les langues sont aussi vives que les battoirs; c’est là que siège le tribunal de la justice féminine assez peu indulgent pour les hommes. Savonnés de haut en bas, resavonnés et rincés, ils y passent de biens mauvais moments. Ces critiques et malédictions en chœurs alternés n’empêchent pas les ménagères d’être fidèles gardiennes de l’économie du foyer...”.<sup>188</sup>

Thus the talk of women is perceived as gossip, largely concerned with their menfolk. In their description of the blacksmith’s workshop, however, the moral “réplique du lavoir”, it is clear that the men are occupied with more important matters:

En cette froide saison c’est le coin le plus animé du village, c’est le ‘forum’ du pays où seuls les mâles sont admis. [...] Il y a toujours dans l’atelier un ou deux bancs sur lesquels viennent s’asseoir les anciens du village, et qu’entourent les oisifs nombreux en cette saison où sont terminés les gros travaux des champs. On y devise et l’on s’y chauffe. On y connaît les nouvelles et les renseignements les plus divers que chacun emporte jusqu’aux lointains hameaux. Le maître d’école (autrefois un des rares habitants qui achetait le journal), conduit la discussion politique.<sup>189</sup>

The description of traditional rural societies by social scientists and historians alike has only worked to reinforce this supposed contrast between gossiping, family-minded females

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<sup>184</sup> Soulet, *Les Pyrénées*, p. 233.

<sup>185</sup> Margairaz, *Foires et marchés*, p. 206.

<sup>186</sup> Roubin, “Male and Female Space”, p. 155.

<sup>187</sup> On the participation of women in “disorderly” political activities such as food riots, see John Bohstedt, “Gender, Household and Community Politics: Women in English Riots, 1790-1810”, *Past and Present*, 120 (1988), pp. 88-122, Jane Rendall, *The Origins of modern feminism: Women in Britain, France and the U.S., 1780-1860* (London, 1985), esp. p. 201; and Bouton, *The Flour War*. Dagmar Freist has pointed out that in the religious domain, another “appropriately” feminine arena, women were allowed more room to voice their opinion: *Governed by Opinion*, pp. 284-5.

<sup>188</sup> Menon and Lecotté, *Au village de France*, p. 112.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

and serious, politically-minded males. Anthropologists in the 1960s and 1970s produced a series of studies of gossip and rumour which presented such forms of communication as crucial to the moral upkeep of the community, while maintaining the perception that they were essentially *feminine* forms of communication.<sup>190</sup> Sociologist Lucienne Roubin, however, has underlined that although the “patterns of female behaviour expected by society” are clear from the space-organisation, the “actual female behaviour” has yet to be studied, since until now, “our knowledge has been transmitted by male ethnologists, working on the basis of evidence given by men.”<sup>191</sup> The elucidation of female voices who spoke out in public, even in those places which might traditionally have been considered a “male” domain, might well be a step towards this goal of understanding historical female behaviour.

It was not uncommon, for example, for the innkeeper, cabaret-owner or tavernkeeper to be a woman, although such places were defined as a “male” area of interaction.<sup>192</sup> For early modern Spain and western Europe in general, Dávid Vassberg explains that the position of innkeeper was not seen as one of high social standing, and thus was often taken on by widows or other women who “needed the scanty income from an occasional paying guest to keep them from destitution”; female tavern-keepers, moreover, have been around since medieval times.<sup>193</sup> Returning to France, Tim Le Goff notes that for eighteenth-century Brittany, “women stayed out of cabarets but sometimes kept them,” and Milan Vulic describes how the wives of miners often ran drinking establishments in semi-industrialised early nineteenth-century Normandy.<sup>194</sup> The role of host or hostess applied equally to women as it did to men: female innkeepers and cabaret-owners knew all of the local news and gossip, and mediated or participated in the conversations of their predominantly male clientele. Thus, it is a woman by the name of Marianne who informs police that a group of soldiers, including some deserters, had met earlier in her cabaret, in the village of Sauveterre, with the intention of forming an illegal

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<sup>190</sup> See Gluckman, “Gossip and Scandal”; Handelman, “Gossip in Encounters”; and Almirol, “Chasing the Elusive Butterfly”. In contrast, please see Rysman, “How the ‘Gossip’”; and Merry, “Rethinking Gossip” (original citations, introduction, footnote 84).

<sup>191</sup> Roubin, “Male and Female Space”, p. 156. Rayna Reiter, in her article, “Men and Women”, also goes a long way towards dispelling such myths.

<sup>192</sup> However, it would not appear from the documentation that women were necessarily excluded; as we have seen, young people often went together in pairs, and at times, particularly on Sundays and religious holidays, entire families might refresh themselves at the cabaret.

<sup>193</sup> Vassberg, *Village and the Outside World*, pp. 131-2, 136.

<sup>194</sup> LeGoff, *Vannes and its Region*, p. 227; Vulic, “Le débit de boissons”, p. 772.



gathering near the castle.<sup>195</sup> In other cases, the presence of the male host's wife represented an active female presence in a supposedly male forum. In a lodging-house near Agen, for example, it was the wife of the innkeeper who announced to her clientele that earlier, "deux grenadiers avaient tenus des propos inciviques à deux citoyens volontaires qui devaient partir aujourd'hui, en leur disant qu'ils allaient à la boucherie, que les ennemis ne tiraient pas sur les habits blancs, mais sur les habits bleus...".<sup>196</sup> Whether male or female, such a talebearer serving drinks each evening must have assured that news spread quickly from the town into the surrounding countryside.

The issue of gender in the theatre of political discussion is an extremely important one, and yet it has been somewhat neglected by both historians and contemporaries. One of the only historians to seriously address the question is Dagmar Freist, whose extensive work on seventeenth-century London shows that while women's political opinions were perceived in a variety of lights, from malicious or trivial gossip to a sign of sexual looseness, they were nevertheless a key component of the realm of popular political opinion. Freist emphasizes the "importance of female networking for the exchange of (personal) news, which could gain political momentum if it were 'publicised', thus blending the private and public spheres". As the authorities gradually acknowledged gossip as "part of public opinion", it became "part of the political", offering "a way of seeing women as intricately involved in politics."<sup>197</sup> As we shall see in chapter III, peasant women in the French Revolution did, indeed, participate in political communication in the village, whether as witnesses, heralds, or speakers themselves. Finding themselves denied the right to vote, an honour which had been so recently and ceremoniously bestowed upon their menfolk, they found other means to participate in the political culture.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L100, pièces 51 et 55; Tribunal criminel, procès contre plusieurs soldats déserteurs ayant participé à un attroupement armé, messidor IV.

<sup>196</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17- 7 and 2L97-19, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Jean Meunier et Jean Denave, militaires, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires, août 1793.

<sup>197</sup> Freist, *Governed by Opinion*, pp. 278-98; in the citation from p. 291, "if it was" has been modified to read "if it were".

<sup>198</sup> Susan Wright has described how women in the Mamasani district of Iran, while not "formally represented in the political arena", may still "exert political influence and be necessary to its processes". In this culture, women move about in the various meeting places of society, "gathering information and testing reactions in ways hardly recognised...sometimes coded into talk about chickens." Although their husbands listen in the evening when these women pass on the information they have gleaned, their role in the formation of political discourse is not formally recognised. See Susan Wright, "Place and Face: Of Women in Doshman Ziari, Iran", in Shirley Ardener (ed.), *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps* (London, 1981), pp. 136-157. The citations are taken from the editor's description of the paper in the introduction to the volume, p. 17. In France, women were used to playing a considerable role in the public life of the village, due to the relatively democratic village councils in the *Midi* under the *ancien régime*.

However, women were not often indicted for their anti-governmental remarks, being seen, as Arlette Farge points out for Paris, as “less civilly and criminally responsible than men”, in spite of the fact that “their more or less acerbic remarks rang incessantly through the market-places and the public squares.”<sup>199</sup> Even the women in the riots and disturbances of the revolutionary era – a traditionally feminine sphere of influence – are commonly seen as *fanatisées* and as easily misled. How then was the role played by women in the circulation of discourse perceived by the authorities, both those disseminating official political information, and those persecuting the disseminators of sedition? How did the presence of women affect political communication among villagers? Was news from a female source as likely to be believed as that from a male source? These questions will resurface periodically in the course of this study, for only by considering the whole of rural society will we arrive at an accurate representation of how politics were communicated in the eighteenth-century countryside.

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<sup>199</sup> Farge, *Subversive Words*, p. 129 and n.10 (p. 209).



## II.

### COMMUNICATING THE REVOLUTION: OBJECTIVES, PLANS AND LIMITATIONS

The Revolution of 1789 represented a *nouveau départ* with respect to the communication of political information in the provinces. As we saw in chapter I, it is true that information had made its way from the capital to the provinces and from urban to rural France under the *Ancien régime* by a variety of means. In addition to oral news networks, which facilitated the circulation of information and ideas on topics that interested the peasantry, a comprehensive infrastructure existed to ensure the communication of official information to the village, involving the *intendants* and their subdelegates as well as the ecclesiastical administrative hierarchy from bishop to parish priest. However, relatively few announcements needed to be made under the *Ancien régime*, and much of what was considered “news” would have been of far less interest to the inhabitants of the countryside than to those of the towns and cities. By comparison, the Revolution marked a true “information explosion”, in both the volume of material which needed to be communicated, and in the purpose for which it was transmitted. It is with this revolutionary transformation of communication between the authorities and the rural population of France that this chapter is concerned.

From the calling of the meeting of the Estates General in 1788 to the tremendous changes and events which followed, the course of the Revolution necessitated the communication of a massive amount of information, as government authorities worked to ensure that inhabitants had the information required to fulfil their duties as citizens of France. Already impressive in 1789 and 1790, the amount of material to be communicated increased dramatically as successive revolutionary assemblies rebuilt the financial and social fabric of the nation, and then, as the outbreak of war and the collapse of the

monarchy required exceptional legislative measures.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these official announcements, however, the relaxation of censorship in 1788 led to an explosion of political writing and publication, opening up “unprecedented possibilities for French men and women to translate their thoughts and opinions into print, [and] to circulate them among one another”,<sup>2</sup> and further adding to the volume of political material in circulation. Short pamphlets addressing the issues of the day began to flourish in late 1788 and continued well into the revolutionary decade as a major genre of political communication,<sup>3</sup> and an unprecedented explosion of the press, both national and provincial, also marked the upheaval.<sup>4</sup> As Harvey Chisick has explained, the elimination of state censorship at the beginning of the Revolution produced a politically engaged press which, for the first time in the eighteenth century, attempted to reach the population as a whole,<sup>5</sup> and which constituted, in Jeremy Popkin’s words, “a vital medium for the communication of political news and ideas.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The tremendous increase in official communiqués during the Revolution, while generally acknowledged, is rarely studied in any detail. The edited work of Michel Cassan and Jean Boutier on the Limousin constitutes a notable exception: *Les Imprimés Limousins, 1788-1799* (Limoges, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Carla Hesse, *Publishing and Cultural Politics in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1810* (Berkeley, 1991), p.1.

<sup>3</sup> See the special issue of the journal *History of European Ideas* (vol.17, no.2-3, 1993) devoted to the “Pamphlet Literature of the French Revolution”, particularly the contributions by Harvey Chisick, “The Pamphlet Literature of the French Revolution: an Overview”, pp. 149-66, and Gruder, “Can we hear the voices”. See also Antoine de Baecque, “Pamphlets: Libel and Political Mythology”, in Darnton and Roche (eds.), *Revolution in Print*, pp. 165-76; Raymond Birn, “The pamphlet press and the Estates-General of 1789”, in Chisick (ed.), *The Press*, pp. 59-70; and Kennedy, *Cultural History*, pp. 316ff.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the more general works cited in the Introduction, consider, on the provincial press, Jeremy D. Popkin, “The Provincial Newspaper Press and Revolutionary Politics”, *French Historical Studies*, 18 (1993), pp. 434-56; Hugh Gough, “The Provincial Press in the French Revolution”, in Alan Forrest and Peter Jones (eds.), *Reshaping France: Town, Country and Region during the French Revolution* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 193-205; Jacques Godechot, “The Provincial Newspaper Press and Revolutionary Politics”, *The Gazette*, 8 (1962), pp. 81-6; Michel Taillefer, “Les journaux toulousains au début de la Révolution, 1789-1793”, in *Pratiques politiques en province à l’époque de la Révolution française* (Montpellier, 1988), pp. 163-74; Christine Peyrard, “Le journalisme politique dans l’Ouest en Révolution”, *History of European Ideas*, 10 (1989), pp. 455-69; Max Fajn, “La Diffusion de la presse révolutionnaire dans le Lot, le Tarn et l’Aveyron sous la Convention et le Directoire”, *Annales du Midi*, 83 (1971), pp. 299-314; and Éric Wauters, *Une presse de province pendant la Révolution française: Journaux et journalistes Normands, 1785-1800* (Paris, 1993), and “La presse départementale en l’an II”, *A.h.R.f.*, 68 (1996), pp. 1-35. On specific newspapers and audiences, see Edelstein, *La Feuille Villageoise*; Béatrice Didier, “La Feuille Villageoise: un dialogue Paris-Province pendant la Révolution”, in *Aux origines provinciales de la Révolution française* (Grenoble, 1990), pp. 267-78; Jeremy D. Popkin, *The Right-Wing Press in France, 1792-1800* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980); Harvey Chisick, *The Production, Distribution and Readership of a Conservative Journal of the Early French Revolution: The Ami du Roi of the Abbé Royou* (Philadelphia, 1992); Simon Burrows, *French Exile Journalism and European Politics, 1792-1814* (Suffolk/Rochester, NY, 2000); Marc Martin, *Les origines de la presse militaire en France à la fin de l’Ancien régime et sous la Révolution, 1770-1799* (Vincennes, 1975); John Lynn, “An Aspect of the Political Education of the French Army: The Distribution of Political Journals, 1793-1794”, *Proceedings of the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe 1750-1850*, 1982, pp. 75-90; and M. Delarue, “L’éducation politique à l’armée du Rhin, 1793-1794”, Unpublished *mémoire de maîtrise*, Université de Paris X-Nanterre, 1968.

<sup>5</sup> Chisick, *The Press*, pp. 6-10. The degree to which newspapers reached rural inhabitants will be dealt with again in chapter V.

<sup>6</sup> Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, pp. 14-5.



Of equal significance to the increase in the volume of information to be communicated was the change in the goal of that communication. The very nature of the political machinery of the Revolution demanded, in stark contrast to that of the *ancien régime*, that the people be kept informed of the workings and decisions of their elected government. As Alison Patrick points out,

For the first time the French people, as well as French officials, were to be kept regularly informed of what their government was doing. [...] From department down to commune, information had to be efficiently communicated to people with uneven administrative background and, necessarily, no experience in interpreting the new decrees; and the public had to be told of decrees regularly and uniformly, as a matter both of right and of necessity, since the functioning of the new system demanded public acceptance and cooperation.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the very nature of political communication had changed with the events of 1789: the people were no longer subjects to be informed of the king's will, but citizens to be kept abreast of issues which affected them.<sup>8</sup> The preoccupation of the deputies of the national assemblies in general, and of the members of the *Comité des décrets* and the *Comité d'instruction publique* in particular, with the communication of political news and information to the nation as a whole, reveals what Jeremy Popkin has called "a new political culture of publicity and openness."<sup>9</sup> Naturally, such "openness" was meant to work both ways: government officials wanted citizens to be informed of their doings, but they also worked to obtain a great deal of information about the doings of their citizens. In counterpoint to the right to petition and to query political actions, rural communities were expected to respond to direct government communications: in addition to specific requests and instructions, more than 350 general questionnaires were sent out during the 1790s by the revolutionary assemblies and their committees, each requesting information of a different nature thereby establishing a veritable dialogue between Paris and the provinces.<sup>10</sup>

Before this ideal of both moulding and surveying the newly enfranchised citizenry could be realised, however, there were a number of obstacles to overcome. First of all, the communications infrastructure of the *ancien régime* was insufficient for the task: engineers and royal agents had long despaired of the state of the roads in the provinces,

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<sup>7</sup> Patrick, "Paper, Posters and People", p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> On this fundamental change, see Kennedy, *Cultural History*, pp. 296-8.

<sup>9</sup> Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, we owe much of our knowledge about the social, economic, cultural and political fabric of late-eighteenth century France to the statistical initiatives of the revolutionaries. See Isabelle Guégan, *Inventaire des enquêtes administratives et statistiques, 1789-1795* (Paris, 1991); also Vovelle, *Découverte de la politique*, p. 111, and Patrick, "Paper, Posters and People", pp. 2-3.

and the postal service had previously been required for little more than the private correspondence of the elite. Moreover, while the system of sending material through royal agents to be read aloud and, when necessary, translated, by local intermediaries, had sufficed for occasional announcements, it was to prove inadequate for the transmission of the volume of information generated by the revolutionary governments. In this chapter, we will examine each of these obstacles, as well as the attempts made by the revolutionary authorities to overcome them. At the end, we will be in a position to evaluate the degree to which official information did, indeed, penetrate into “la France profonde”, attaining its goal of keeping the rural citizenry abreast of national affairs. A brief conclusion will build upon this assessment by reviewing various other means by which revolutionaries attempted to communicate a politicised, pro-Republican message, including newspapers, almanacs and other printed media, as well as songs, images, ceremonies and various forms of political sociability.

### The Administrative and Communications Infrastructure in 1790

The far-reaching changes brought to the way in which political information was communicated to the people are often heralded as one of the greatest successes of the Revolution, but these changes were not instantaneous. At first, the existing administrative hierarchy of the *ancien régime* remained in place, for while Old Regime methods of communicating with the provinces would eventually prove inadequate, they nevertheless gave succour to the National Assembly as it confronted the need to disseminate large quantities of printed information to the nation's citizens in 1789 and 1790. According to an interim study by Alison Patrick, monarchical officials such as *intendants* and *subdélégués* were expected to remain responsible for their positions until new authorities were in place, an event delayed in some areas until late 1790. In some instances, the degree to which they might have been willing to do so is questionable, and the revolutionary government was forced to depend unofficially upon the continued good will of local notables to ensure that decrees were reprinted, distributed, and promulgated in the provinces.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, when elections finally took place, it was for the most part the experienced administrative personnel of the *ancien régime* who continued to fulfil these

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<sup>11</sup> Patrick, “Paper, Posters and People”, p. 4; and “Reform and the Citizen: Administrative Process and Public Reaction”, in Edna Lemay and Alison Patrick, *Revolutionaries at Work: The Constituent Assembly, 1789-1791* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 78-91.



functions, a natural circumstance given that it was the urban professionals and bourgeois who were the most ardent supporters of the early Revolution.<sup>12</sup>

The continuity of communications structures from the *ancien régime* to the Revolution is even more striking at the village level, where factors such as force of habit and a limited number of literate intermediaries combined to produce very little change in the channels by which official information was disseminated. Village notables, including large landowners, blacksmiths, parish priests and other influential members of rural society often retained their roles as members of the new municipalities, particularly in the south-west, where the long-established democratic tradition enabled a smooth transition.<sup>13</sup> The role of the village *curé* in particular, in reading, translating and explaining new laws and decrees, remained constant. In the 1790s, therefore, those who received, discussed, and passed on information from the authorities were by and large the same individuals who had done so before the Revolution. The National Assembly approved of and encouraged this state of affairs, sending out frequent reminders that the laws and orders of the government were to be read aloud after mass.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, as Alison Patrick has pointed out, it was only later that "the collapse of the alliance between the State and the traditional Church brought... the effective collapse of the pulpit as a medium of communication."<sup>15</sup> True, the *agents nationaux* of the Year II would theoretically take the place of the parish priests, with the reading of laws in the Temple of Reason intended as a central activity of the republican ceremonies each *décadi*.<sup>16</sup> However, these civic replacements would prove far less successful than their predecessors, as the ceremonies were poorly attended and the majority of the population was either wary or indifferent.

While local patterns of official communication would remain constant until the Directory,<sup>17</sup> the administrative hierarchy through which information reached the villages

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<sup>12</sup> Alfred Cobban, "Local Government during the French Revolution", in *Aspects of the French Revolution* (New York/London, 1968), pp. 112-30. Cobban writes that "in the main the administrative personnel of the *ancien régime* was taken over with little change by the Revolution, and the same personnel seems to have survived generally in local administration up to the summer of 1793, when the Jacobins introduced considerable changes"; p.117.

<sup>13</sup> See Fournier, *Démocratie et vie municipale*, and "Municipalités languedociennes", as well as Godechot, "Aux origines".

<sup>14</sup> *Bulletin des Lois*; see, for example, 20 octobre-3 novembre 1789, 5-6 novembre 1789, 11 décembre 1789, 23-26 février 1790, 15-26 mai 1790, 2-3 juin 1790, 2-5 novembre 1790, 20 avril 1791, 10 et 18-20 mai 1791.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick, "Paper, Posters and People", p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> "Loi sur le mode du gouvernement révolutionnaire", 14 frimaire II; cited in F.V.A. Aulard, *Recueil des actes du Comité de salut public, avec la correspondance officielle des représentants en mission et le registre du Conseil exécutif provisoire*, vol.9, pp. 149-50 (section I, Article 10, "Envoi et promulgation des lois").

<sup>17</sup> See pages 89-90, below, for changes brought by the Year III constitution.

was completely reorganised early in the Revolution. By the laws of 14 December 1789 and 26 February 1790, the National Assembly created a rationalised, three-tiered structure of departments, districts and communes worthy of the heirs of the *siècle des lumières*.<sup>18</sup> The first of the two was the well-known *loi sur les municipalités*, by which every "ville, bourg, village ou communauté de campagne" was to constitute its own municipality. However, it was with the second law, on local government, that administration at the intermediary level was organised. Departments were divided into districts, ideally between six and nine depending on population and area; districts were subdivided into cantons, and cantons into communes.<sup>19</sup> In practice, the shape and size of departments varied considerably, and the acquisition of the position of *chef-lieu* was, for towns throughout France, the object of much debate, petitioning, and contestation.<sup>20</sup> Of the two areas studied (see Figure 2-1, following page), the departments of the Dordogne and Lot-et-Garonne were characterised by a greater number of large communes and an extensive administrative structure, arising from their slightly more urbanised nature. Typically, one district was responsible for administering and communicating with an average of approximately 50 communes. The situation in the departments of the Pyrenees provide an important contrast. The relatively small number of significant towns in mountainous regions led to each district seat being responsible for a large number of rural communes, for in spite of the tendency, arising from the communal nature of pastoral life, to group smaller administrative units together, mountain hamlets tended to be far more scattered than their counterparts in the plains.<sup>21</sup> As a result, each district seat in the departments of the central Pyrenees administered more than 100 communes, with Saint-Gaudens, the southernmost district of the Haute-Garonne, communicating with over 200 localities.

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<sup>18</sup> See Jacques Godechot, *Les Institutions de la France sous la Révolution et l'Empire*, fifth edition (Paris, 1998), pp. 91-112, and Cobban, "Local Government", pp. 13-4. The texts of the decrees themselves can be found in the *Archives Parlementaires* (hereafter, A.P.), vol.10, pp. 564ff, 14 décembre 1789; vol.11, p.716ff, 26 February 1790.

<sup>19</sup> The cantons, the administrative constituency existing between the district and commune levels, were not endowed with a political function until the constitution of Year III. Prior to this cantons were merely the basic unit of local elections and the seat of the *juge de paix*. Godechot, *Les Institutions*, p. 108; Isser Woloch, "The State and the Villages in Revolutionary France", in Alan Forrest and Peter Jones (eds.), *Reshaping France: Town, Country and Region during the French Revolution* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 221-42.

<sup>20</sup> The treatises, petitions and arguments surrounding the choices made of department and district *chef-lieux* are a rich source for rural historians, in that they reveal much about local antagonisms and pretensions. Godechot, *Les Institutions*, pp. 98-102, provides only a brief introduction to the topic; for further detail, see Ted Margadant, *Urban Rivalries in the French Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 1992); and Forrest, *Revolution in Provincial France*, ch.3, "The Loss of Innocence", and "Le découpage administratif de la France révolutionnaire", in *L'Espace et le temps reconstruits: La Révolution française, une révolution des mentalités et des cultures; Actes du colloque de Marseilles, 1989* (Aix-en-Provence, 1990), pp. 3-12.

<sup>21</sup> On this topic, see Woloch, "State and the Villages".



**Figure 2-1**  
**Administrative Divisions in Departments Studied**

Department	No. of districts	Population (1806)	No. of cantons	Total no. of communes	Average no. of communes per district	Average population	
						per district	per commune
Dordogne	9	424 113	74	686	76	47 124	618
Lot-et-Garonne	9	353 044	73	284	32	39 227	1243
Ariège	3	222 936	27	352	117	74 312	633
Hautes-Pyrénées	5	198 757	30	533	107	39 751	372
District of Saint-Gaudens (Haute-Garonne) <sup>22</sup>			11	241	241		

Sources: For the administrative statistics of each department, see A.D. Dordogne, 1L346, *État des municipalités*, 1791; René Bonnat, *Inventaire des archives départementales postérieures à 1789... Période révolutionnaire, Série L.* (Agen, 1925), pp. vii-xiv, "Tableau des districts, cantons et municipalités du département de Lot-et-Garonne en 1791"; A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, L168, *Divisions administratives*, 1790; A.D. Ariège, 1L132, *Élections: Liste des communes et du nombre d'officiers municipaux auxquels elles ont droit*, 1790. For population figures, see Bernard Lepetit *et al.* (eds.), *Population*, vol.8 of the series, *Atlas de la Révolution française* (Paris: Éditions de l'É.H.É.S.S., 1995). Although it might be objected that the sources for the number of communes and districts date from early in the Revolution, whereas the population figures date from 1806, any change in population over this period would be relatively minor, and the inclusion of population in the table is only incidental to its main purpose.

While there have been relatively few studies devoted to the new local bodies and to their role as intermediaries between the revolutionary government and the provincial population, the significance of the reforms is generally acknowledged.<sup>23</sup> Throughout France, the structure of the administration, and, in theory, its manner of functioning, would

<sup>22</sup> Comparable population figures are unavailable. The district of Saint-Gaudens has been included solely for the commune-to-district ratio.

<sup>23</sup> Since Alfred Cobban expressed his frustration in 1968 with the lack of studies of local government during the Revolution, little research has been devoted expressly to the topic: see "Local Government". Most studies of local politics have focussed upon the personnel rather than the hierarchy of institutions, emphasizing either continuity in leadership or conflict and change: see, for example, Jean-Pierre Jessenne, *Pouvoir au village*, pp. 49-121, and the contributions to Roger Dupuy (ed.), *Pouvoir local et Révolution, 1780-1850: la frontière intérieure. Colloque international de Rennes, 28 sept. - 1<sup>er</sup> octobre 1993* (Rennes, 1987). For general indications on the structures of local government, see Godechot, *Les Institutions*, pp. 91-112, and Vovelle, *Découverte de la politique*, pp. 100-4. Charles Godard made an early attempt at a local study with *Le Conseil général de la Haute-Loire, le Directoire et l'administration départementale de 1790 à 1800* (Paris, 1909); more recently, Roger Duck made a promising foray into the field with an M.A. thesis entitled "National Politics and the Development of Local Administrative Structures during the French Revolution: The Example of the Herault, 1789-1801", Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Kent at Canterbury, 1993. While the apparent dryness of the topic has doubtless discouraged scholars from undertaking more studies in this area, the archives of local administrative bodies are rich with indications on how political information was communicated within their constituencies.



henceforth be completely uniform, an immense improvement upon the overlapping jurisdictions of the *ancien régime*. The administrative body which sat at the *chef-lieu* of the department comprised thirty-six individuals, elected for a term of two years and renewable by halves; in analogous fashion, the members of the district administrations numbered twelve and were elected in the same manner. Each administration met in its entirety only twice yearly, in a *Conseil*, with the bulk of the work being done by an executive *Directoire*, comprised of eight members in the case of the department and four in the case of the district.<sup>24</sup> Departmental administrators were responsible for the adjudication of tax collection, public welfare, education, agriculture, and roadworks on a large scale, while district administrators implemented the application of their orders in the region for which they were responsible – distributing the tax burden among the communes, for example – as well as handling issues such as local policing, the sale of national properties, the administration of the national guard and the composition of electoral lists. The regularization of the administrative structure made it at least possible that similar measures could be carried out in exactly the same way, by similar agents in similar sections of territory, throughout the nation.

Naturally, one of the primary concerns of the deputies involved in reorganizing the workings of the state had been the retention of regular channels of communication. Indeed, the very drawing of the departments was done with communication in mind: no town or village, it was stipulated, was to be more than one day's ride from the *chef-lieu* of its department.<sup>25</sup> By mid-1790, a system was in place by which the masses of information produced by the revolutionary government could be transmitted from one level of administration to the next.<sup>26</sup> At the top sat the Assembly, which passed the decrees and sent them before the king for his sanction. After the king had placed his seal on both the legislation and the accompanying *lettre patente*, these were passed on to the appropriate minister, who added his signature and forwarded copies to each of the departmental *chef-lieux*. There, an elected official known as the *procureur-général-syndic*, essentially a representative of the king who oversaw the application of the laws, would arrange for them

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<sup>24</sup> Godechot, *Les Institutions*, pp. 102, 105-6; Cobban, "Local Government", p. 116.

<sup>25</sup> The concept had actually been advanced prior to 1789 by the Physiocrats; see Godechot, *Les Institutions*, p.94, and Forrest, "Le découpage administratif".

<sup>26</sup> See the text of the 1791 constitution, titre III, chapitre IV, section I<sup>re</sup>, "De la promulgation des lois", at <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/constitution/c1791.htm>. The fact that it took some months for the National Assembly to institute new channels of political communication has been cited by Lynn Hunt as one of the reasons for the autonomous development of urban politics at the beginning of the Revolution. See Hunt, "Committees and Communes: Local Politics and National Revolution in 1789", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18 (1976), pp. 321-45, esp. p. 323.



to be reprinted and distributed, through the help of the districts, to every municipality.<sup>27</sup>

This initial formulation of the procedure for sending out individual laws and decrees, while effective, generated tremendous costs, both in terms of human work-hours and actual expense.<sup>28</sup> However, the fact that a special *Comité des décrets* was established in November 1789 to mastermind the entire process testifies not only to the volume of work involved, but also to the importance which the National Assembly attached to the communication of official texts.<sup>29</sup> In October 1791, when the newly constituted Legislative Assembly undertook to review and evaluate the numerous committees established by the National Assembly, the retention of the *Comité des décrets* was demanded by many individuals, based on "la nécessité de surveiller l'expédition et l'envoi des décrets dans les départements."<sup>30</sup> Later, during a crisis of government messengers in Paris in August 1792, the Assembly decreed that the *Comité des décrets* be permitted to employ outside help, such that "rien ne retarde les expéditions de ses bureaux."<sup>31</sup> Indeed, until its replacement by the *Agence de l'envoi des lois* under the provisions of the law of 14 frimaire II, the *Comité des décrets* provided regular reports on the decrees sent into the provinces. Their actions frequently drew comments, suggestions, and motions from the deputies in session, who were keen that the lines of communications with the population in the provinces be kept open and functioning smoothly.<sup>32</sup>

In the departments themselves, local administrators were employed full-time in the transmission and application of legislation originating in Paris.<sup>33</sup> In fact, although they were responsible for a bewildering variety of issues, these intermediary bodies fulfilled a role which was primarily communicative and, at best, executive, as they had no powers to undertake new initiatives without authorization from Paris.<sup>34</sup> The departmental administrations – located, for this study, in Périgueux, Agen, Tarbes, Toulouse, and Foix

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<sup>27</sup> Godechot, *Les Institutions*, pp. 97, 102.

<sup>28</sup> See Patrick, "Reform and the Citizen", and especially, "Paper, Posters, and People".

<sup>29</sup> The formation of the committee was proposed on 21 November 1789 by Rabaud de Saint-Etienne, because, as he reported, "dans sa province beaucoup de municipalités n'ont pas encore reçu divers décrets de l'Assemblée, notamment les arrêtés du 4 août," A.P. vol.10, p. 159. See also A.P. vol.22, p.22-3 (12 novembre 1791) and vol.34, p. 629 (4 novembre 1791), for the continuing discussion on the topic.

<sup>30</sup> A.P. vol.34, p. 239, 15 octobre 1791.

<sup>31</sup> A.P. vol.47, p. 594, 9 août 1792.

<sup>32</sup> For example, A.P. vol.53, p. 92; vol.48, p. 276.

<sup>33</sup> The indications given in this chapter regarding the activities of district administrations have been gleaned from a sampling of the following sources: A.D. Ariège, series 2L-4L; A.D. Dordogne, series 2L-10L; A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, L553-L816bis; A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, L690-L778; and A.D. Haute-Garonne, 2L4220-4239 (district of Saint-Gaudens). The papers of the district administrations, which are voluminous, varied, and extremely well-organised, have been largely neglected, in spite of their tremendous value for understanding this essential link between the state and the villages.

<sup>34</sup> This point is clearly made by Cobban, "Local Government", p. 117.

– were responsible for reprinting the texts received from Paris; copies were then sent out in bundles to the district administrators, who forwarded them on to the communes, as well as to a wide variety of institutions and important individuals, such as judicial courts and *juges de paix*. In addition, although towns designated as *chef-lieux de canton* did not have their own administration until 1795, district authorities sometimes used local notables there in the way the *intendants* had employed *subdélégués*, asking them to pass on decrees, or to furnish information on communes within the canton. Questionnaires, in particular, were frequently sent out to district and canton seats, requesting information concerning the health and welfare of the population, details on various social groups, the crops which grew well locally, and a multitude of other topics. In addition to sending texts on to the villages, provincial administrators were also expected to communicate back up the ladder, reporting on the local execution of laws and forwarding any questions or concerns to the appropriate authorities in Paris.<sup>35</sup> At each administrative level, local officials were obliged to keep detailed records of their active and passive correspondence with authorities both above and below, a requirement which has resulted in an extremely rich archive for the study of official communication.

One of the main roles of local government early in the Revolution was, in the words of an administrator of the Lot-et-Garonne, [to] “exciter les communautés qui seraient arriérées et d’éveiller le zèle des municipalités qui apporteraient trop d’indifférence.”<sup>36</sup> Often, this was accomplished by a simple covering letter, as well as instructions to the municipalities specifying what was expected of them, as in this circular sent out by the Department of the Dordogne in September 1790:

Le Directoire du département... pénétré de l’importance des objets dont il doit s’occuper... croit essentiel... de tracer aux directoires des districts, et aux municipalités, sous l’inspection des districts, une instruction uniforme sur tous les objets compris dans le décret du 28 juin. Il en résultera plus de simplicité, plus d’activité, et plus d’accord dans toutes les branches de l’administration...<sup>37</sup>

The decree cited in the circular concerned a number of issues, including requests for information about the state of the road network, the use of local funds, repairs to presbyteries, sales of national properties, and the organization of tax collection. This last objective, which had caused difficulties throughout France in the preceding months, was

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<sup>35</sup> See A.N., series F1<sup>III</sup> for this correspondence.

<sup>36</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, L755, Délibérations de l’administration du district de Tonneins, août 1790-août 1791; speech of Crebessac, administrateur de district, 19 octobre 1790, fol. 38v-39r.

<sup>37</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 1L336, Correspondance du département de la Dordogne, 1790-an IV; Instruction adressée par le directoire du département aux districts et aux municipalités... pour l’exécution du Décret de l’Assemblée nationale du 28 juin 1790.



of particular concern to the administrators of the Dordogne, and so they endeavoured, in a fatherly way, to draw attention to it in their preamble:

Chaque municipalité hâtera, le plus qu'il sera possible, la confection, vérification et recouvrement des rôles des impositions... les officiers municipaux doivent considérer cet objet comme un des plus importants de leur administration. La rareté du numéraire est causée surtout par les retards du recouvrement des impositions. Tous les citoyens qui chérissent la liberté et la patrie doivent regarder comme un devoir sacré d'acquitter sans délai le montant de leurs contributions. L'ordre et le crédit public ne peuvent se rétablir que par ce moyen. Ainsi les besoins de l'état, la sûreté publique, et les décrets de l'Assemblée nationale pressent également le recouvrement des impôts...<sup>38</sup>

While such covering letters and encouraging remarks were common enough, ensuring the execution of a given order often required a considerably greater effort. Departmental administrators were regularly forced to monitor the activities of communes in which the municipal officers were barely literate and too busy to give their administrative role any serious attention, and in which the inhabitants were just as happy to avoid paying taxes and filling out questionnaires. Local authorities used various methods to inspire activity in such circumstances: reminder notices were sent out, and with more urgent issues, the author of the text was careful to include a date after which a negligent municipal officer could be threatened with arrest. In extreme cases, *commissaires* were sent into the countryside to "help" villagers complete the required paperwork, with the cost of the *commissaire's* journey to be paid by the commune. Finally, it was the responsibility of the department and district administrators to rectify "incorrect" interpretations of decrees, a task which varied from resolving language problems to policing insolence and resistance.

As the true intermediaries between villagers and the government in Paris, local administrative bodies not only forwarded official communication from the capital to the countryside, but also dealt with requests and petitions from local inhabitants, usually sent through the intermediary of a municipal council. The variety of issues touched upon in this body of correspondence is almost without limit, but the intentions with which the letters were composed generally fall into one of three categories: descriptions of difficulties in the application of laws, the articulation of complaints, and requests for financial aid. The first of these three tended to be from municipal councils, explaining how a particular local contingency made the execution of an order problematic. Such letters seem well-intentioned for the most part at the beginning of the Revolution, but come increasingly to

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

bear the mark of wily peasants seeking a means of escape. The second category – the voicing of complaints – concerned, for the most part, interpersonal conflicts and property claims that would have been better directed to a *juge de paix* or other custodian of public order, revealing the initial tendency of villagers to address any given issue to the most easily accessible authority. The third type of correspondence – requests for financial aid – came either from individuals whose property had been damaged by floods, storms, or hail, and who consequently requested reductions in their taxes, or from municipal councils requesting funds to arm their national guard or pay the salary of a messenger to pick up their mail. While such correspondence, on the whole, is valuable primarily to historians working on the specific topics addressed, its copiousness and, indeed, its existence at all, testifies to the desire of the rural population to take advantage of its newly-found rights and freedom to communicate on political issues. Local administrations, at the district level in particular, were aware of the needs and wishes of the inhabitants of the countryside, and played an important role, not only as “les yeux et les bras” of the authorities in the department,<sup>39</sup> but also as the point of contact through which peasants and rural artisans interacted with the nation.

### Problems with the volume of deliveries

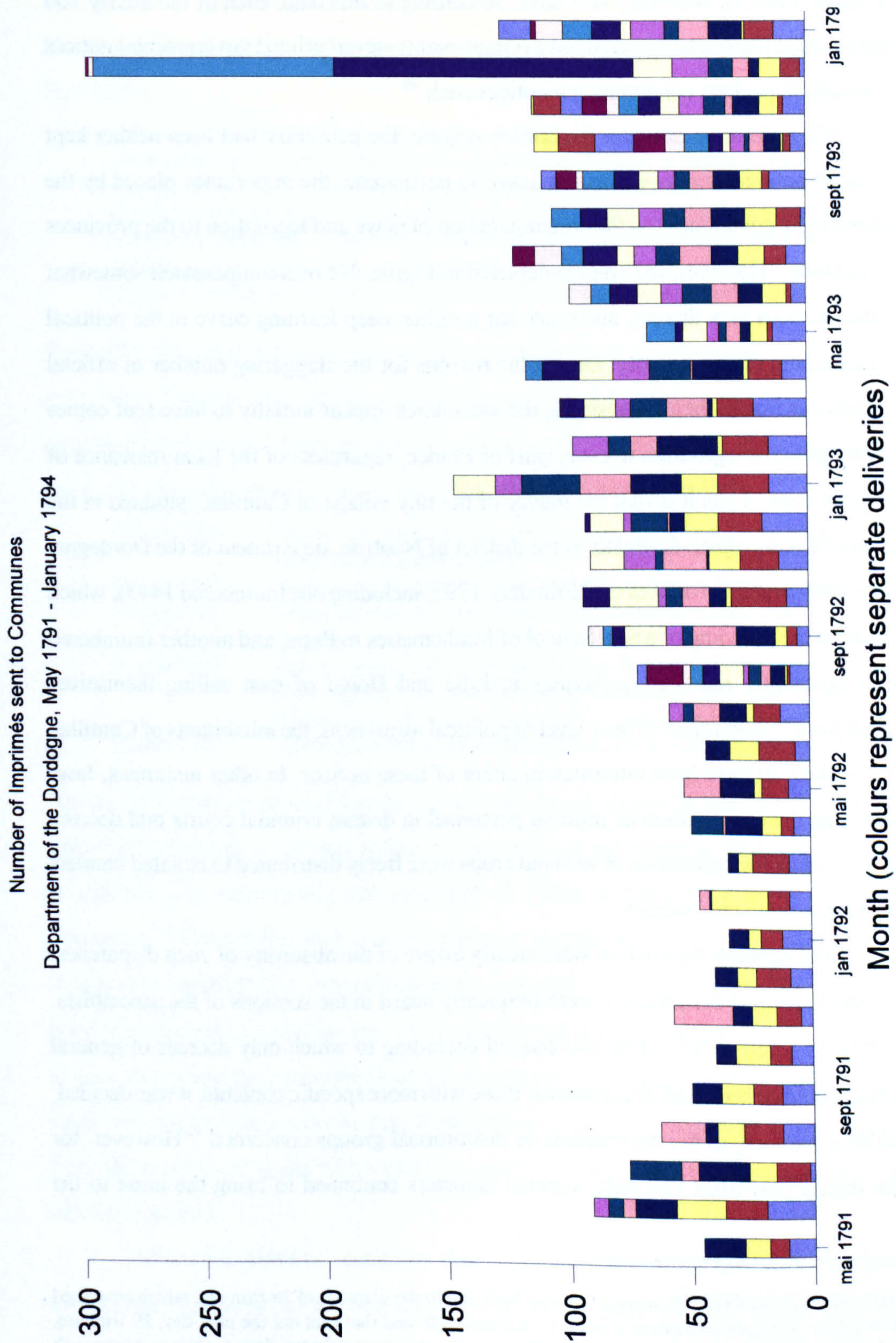
While the administrative system described thus far appears to have functioned well at the beginning of the revolutionary decade, the volume of information which needed to be communicated would increase considerably, particularly after the outbreak of war in April 1792, threatening to overwhelm the newly-created infrastructure. Figure 2-2 (following page), which indicates the number of printed notices and decrees forwarded by the departmental administration of the Dordogne from May 1791 through January 1794, depicts the sheer quantity of information sent into the countryside. Apart from a slight increase in the number of dispatches in June and July of 1791, owing to events and legislative measures surrounding the flight of the King to Varennes, the figures remain relatively consistent until the spring of 1792, when they begin to increase, reaching a maximum, incredibly, of 297 notices in December 1793, the month in which the *gouvernement provisoire et révolutionnaire* was decreed. Figure 2-2 also illustrates the frequency of dispatches to individual villages, ranging from four per month, or approximately one delivery per week, to a maximum of fifteen deliveries in October and

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<sup>39</sup> Godechot, *Les Institutions*, pp. 106-7.



Figure 2-2





November 1793, or one every two days. According to this data, each of the nearly 700 villages of the Dordogne received, on average, eighty-seven printed governmental notices per month, in packets containing ten notices each.<sup>40</sup>

Considering that under the *ancien régime*, the peasantry had been neither kept abreast of political developments nor asked to participate, the importance placed by the revolutionary government on the communication of news and legislation to the provinces is exemplary. However, the volume depicted in Figure 2-2 overcompensated somewhat for the previous lack thereof, and made for a rather steep learning curve in the political apprenticeship of the majority. One of the reasons for the staggering number of official dispatches is that in their enthusiasm, the assemblies appear initially to have sent copies of every piece of legislation to every part of France, regardless of the local relevance of any given item. Thus it is that the mayor of the tiny village of Cantillac, situated in the canton of Champagnac-de-Belair in the district of Nontron, department of the Dordogne, received seven printed notices on 22 January 1792, including one (numbered 1443), which concerned the founding of a new School of Mathematics in Paris, and another (numbered 1464) describing seditious gatherings in Lille and Douai of men calling themselves *brabançons*.<sup>41</sup> Regardless of their level of political awareness, the inhabitants of Cantillac were unlikely to have been interested in either of these notices. In other instances, laws concerning the organization of judicial personnel in distant criminal courts and decrees recommending the cultivation of lowland crops were freely distributed to isolated hamlets in Pyrenean mountain valleys.

The deputies themselves were clearly aware of the absurdity of such dispatches, and calls to resolve the situation were frequently heard in the sessions of the assemblies. As early as 8 July 1791, a law was passed according to which only decrees of general interest would be sent to all departments; those with more specific contents, it was decided, should be sent only to the departments or institutional groups concerned.<sup>42</sup> However, for more than a year after this date, various ministers continued to bring the issue to the

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<sup>40</sup> The total for December 1793 was particularly high due to the dispatch of 28 frimaire, which contained nine separate packages containing at least 15 decrees each, and that sent out the next day, 29 frimaire, which contained seven separate packages. Allowing for approximately ten days for the texts to reach Périgueux, it is reasonable to assume that these two massive deliveries were connected with the declaration of revolutionary government on 14 frimaire an II. If we discount the month of December 1793 as an aberration, the average number of laws arriving in the villages is reduced from 87 to 78.

<sup>41</sup> A.D. Dordogne, E dep 252 Cantillac, 1D1\*, *Délibérations de conseil municipal et enregistrement des lois*, 1790-an X, pp. 114-20.

<sup>42</sup> A.P. vol.28, p. 40, 8 juillet 1791; see also the later discussion of the issue, A.P. vol.38, p. 422, 11 février 1792.



attention of the Assembly, indicating that it had not yet been resolved. In March 1792, the Minister of the Interior, Cahier de Gerville, wrote to the president of the *Assemblée législative*:

M. le ministre de la justice a proposé à l'Assemblée nationale, de vouloir bien, selon le vœu d'un décret de l'Assemblée nationale constituante, déclarer en marge de ses décrets, ceux qui doivent être imprimés et envoyés à tous les départements. L'Assemblée n'a encore rien décidé à cet égard. L'incertitude sur cet objet a obligé de les faire imprimer et distribuer presque tous... [même] les lois particulières qui n'ont rapport qu'à certains cantons, souvent même à une seule municipalité...ce qui occasionne de très grandes dépenses. Il serait, je crois, à propos que l'Assemblée prît (*sic*) une décision à cet égard.<sup>43</sup>

Even after this clear mandate, the Assembly was forced to readdress the issue later that year, when Danton, then minister of justice, submitted his report of the decrees sent nationwide that week. Of the fourteen texts listed, only five might have been described as being of "general interest". Among the nine remaining decrees we find:

- 10 août 1792. Décret qui convoque les sections de Paris, pour procéder à la réélection des juges de paix.
- 12 août 1792. Décret relatif au paiement de l'acquisition du port de Montmarin.
- 13 août 1792. Décret qui charge le ministre de la guerre de faire fabriquer cent pièces de canons.
- 14 août 1792. Décret portant qu'il sera fait mention honorable de la présentation d'une somme de 384 livres en numéraire, faite par le sieur Labaudunais, Breton, pour servir à l'acquit de ses impositions.
- 14 août 1792. Décret qui ordonne la translation à Paris des Suisses détenus à Rueil.<sup>44</sup>

Again, the Assembly decreed that the *Comité des décrets* should be more attentive, so that henceforth, "les lois ou décrets rendus sur des affaires particulières, ne soient ni publiés ni affichés à la manière des lois générales de l'État, à moins d'un décret exprès qui l'ordonne."<sup>45</sup> Considering that so much irrelevant material was sent into the provinces, one is forced to conclude that, astonishing as the evidence reported in Figure 2-2 might be, it is indeed either an underestimation, or else departmental administrators were wisely frugal in how they spent their printing budgets. At any rate, the historian of provincial France soon becomes accustomed to finding, in departmental archives, irrelevant announcements from the revolutionary era which had been used in subsequent years as scrap paper and binding material.

While the deputies' concerns over irrelevant dispatches may have somewhat reduced the number of printed notices received by rural municipalities, the increase, from September 1792, of legislation considered relevant appears to have more than accounted

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<sup>43</sup> A.P. vol.39, p. 599; 12 mars 1792.

<sup>44</sup> A.P. vol.48, p. 276, 16 août 1792.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*



for the difference. This constant barrage of official information had two notable ill effects. Firstly, under the eighteenth-century postal system, delivery costs fell to the recipient: in this case, village municipal councils. For some communities, the cost associated with collecting official mail provided a perfect excuse to ignore inconvenient legislation. For many others, however, particularly in mountain valleys which were less well-integrated into the monetary economy, it represented a real financial burden. In the Hautes-Pyrénées, the departmental administration took it upon itself to resolve the problem, declaring that "il [ne] sera fait qu'un envoi par semaine des décrets de l'Assemblée nationale et des délibérations du corps administratif, en raison des frais considérables que ces envois imposent aux municipalités."<sup>46</sup> In the district of Saint-Gaudens in the Haute-Garonne, however, local administrators eventually decided that the cost of mail pick-up was a necessary evil, for while they had tried simply sending deliveries to the *chef-lieu de canton*, thence to be collected by each municipality, laws were arriving too late, incomplete, or going missing altogether.<sup>47</sup>

Secondly, and more importantly in the long-term, the volume of material sent out put a strain on the traditional methods by which political news was communicated in the village, eventually lessening the enthusiasm of the peasantry for the Revolution. The minutes of village councils often make reference to having received a "package of laws", and the mere listing of them can take several pages, again confirming the statistics presented above. As early as 1790, there was a rash of resignations among municipal secretaries, who could not handle the volume of incoming information.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the parish priest could certainly not have read aloud every law and decree, as he was required to do both by custom and by the National Assembly, never mind translate them into *patois*; and as Alison Patrick has pointed out, "one wonders where small communities found space to post all the posters."<sup>49</sup> Increasingly, even municipal officers glossed over the majority of the texts, and posted only those they thought most important. The repetitive and insistent nature of the texts also irritated the recipients: once the initial excitement over

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<sup>46</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, L127, Délibérations du Directoire du département, 27 juillet 1790.

<sup>47</sup> A.D. Haute-Garonne, 2L4220, Délibérations du district de Saint-Gaudens, 1790-1792; 6 novembre 1791.

<sup>48</sup> The secretarial position had usually been occupied by a local *greffier* or *notaire*, whose regular obligations made it impossible to accommodate the increased municipal workload brought by the Revolution. In the village of Lafox, for example, the municipal council noted that "les appointements attribués à l'ancien secrétaire greffier sont très insuffisants, à raison des affaires extraordinaires qui surviennent depuis la Révolution du Royaume et la formation de l'Assemblée nationale"; (A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Edép. Lafox 1D1, 4 juillet 1790). After the resignation of a secretary, villages were forced to offer a more highly paid position.

<sup>49</sup> Patrick, "Paper, Posters and People", p. 9.



the abolition of feudalism and the democratisation of the vote died down, rural officials manifested a growing resentment with the reiterated demands for grain requisitions and army recruits. The mayor of the small village of Monbalen, in the Lot-et-Garonne, finally lost his patience in the Year II, and was arrested for saying that the National Assembly was composed of idiots who did not know what they were doing, and that they could wipe their arses with their decrees, as far as he was concerned.<sup>50</sup>

Both problems – the high cost of the delivery of laws on the one hand, and the frustration of local administrators on the other – were partially solved by measures undertaken later in the Revolution. It was not until the Year VI that the Directory assumed the cost of sending official mail,<sup>51</sup> but even by that point, other initiatives had alleviated the situation. In the first section of the *Loi sur le mode du gouvernement révolutionnaire*, established in the spring of 1794, the *Comité de Salut Public* created the *Bulletin des Lois*, which reduced the sheer volume of mail by consolidating individual notices into one publication.<sup>52</sup> For the Convention, the *Bulletin* was an improved means of making sure that laws arrived, an absolute necessity in a time of extraordinary measures. Moreover, it was generally well-received, to judge from the considerable correspondence from administrators in tiny provincial towns who were concerned that their copies were arriving irregularly.<sup>53</sup> However, while the number of dispatches had been reduced to one per *décade* per addressee, there were still some 80,000 of these, for *Bulletins* were being sent not only to every commune in France, but also to all civil servants further up the hierarchy, including departmental and district administrators, *juges de paix*, lawyers and court judges.<sup>54</sup> The situation was not truly alleviated until the autumn of 1795, when the Year III constitution brought a reorganisation of municipal administration. Communes of fewer than 5,000 inhabitants were no longer to have a municipal council: deprived of their autonomy, they could only elect an *agent municipal* and an *adjoint* as delegates to the

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<sup>50</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne 2L98 and 2L105, Tribunal révolutionnaire, procès contre Jean Marabal, cultivateur et Guillaume Marabal, cultivateur et ci-devant maire, frères, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires, nivôse-pluviôse an II.

<sup>51</sup> Patrick, "Paper, Posters and People", p. 3. Before Year VI, particularly important texts were occasionally sent out 'franc de port', such as, for example, some of Robespierre's speeches; see Aulard, *Recueil*, vol.8, p. 711.

<sup>52</sup> "Loi sur le mode du gouvernement révolutionnaire", 14 frimaire an II; cited in Aulard, *Recueil*, vol.9, pp.149-50; for more on the *Bulletin*, see Hesse, *Publishing*, chapter 4; and Isser Woloch, *The New Regime: Transformations of the French Civic Order, 1789-1820s* (New York/London, 1994).

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, the file of such correspondence from the department of the Dordogne, A.N. D XL 25 dossier 120.

<sup>54</sup> A.D. Ariège, 1L167, Postes et service de dépêches, an III-VII; Lettre de l'Agence de l'envoi des lois, relative à un nouvel ordre de service, 5 vendémiaire an III.



assembly at the cantonal seat.<sup>55</sup> Although laws supposedly continued to be read out loud, the government depended for this upon both the interest and the competence of the *agents* and *adjoints municipaux* to assiduously attend administrative meetings in the *chef-lieu de canton*, carry relevant information back to their villages with them, and report it promptly and faithfully. Indeed, this interest was often lacking.<sup>56</sup> Overall, far less information travelled back into the villages, and the peasants – rather dissatisfied with the bourgeois turn the Revolution had taken – were at any rate perfectly happy to be left in peace and quiet.

### Road and postal networks

The attrition of municipal personnel was not the only sign that the communications infrastructure could not handle such a volume of material. At the start of the Revolution, the state of the road network and postal system also left much to be desired. Indeed, the *Archives parlementaires* and the correspondence of the *représentants-en-mission* abound with reports of the poor quality of the postal service, with the *représentants* including “lack of communication” among their explanations for continued rural resistance.<sup>57</sup> As described in chapter I, under the *ancien régime* letters and packages had been carried to main drop-off points, known as *bureaux de dépêches*, most often by *messageries* and *diligences* which also carried goods and passengers.<sup>58</sup> From there, mail was carried to one of the more numerous *bureaux de distribution*, where it remained until collected by the addressee. This system had largely sufficed for an era in which the great majority of correspondence was addressed to civil servants and other members of the provincial elite, whose town of residence most likely contained a *bureau de distribution*. However, the revolutionary emphasis upon delivering political information to every village in France, albeit through the intermediary of departmental and district administrations,

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<sup>55</sup> Godechot, *Les Institutions*, pp. 472-6; Woloch, “State and the Villages”.

<sup>56</sup> Indeed, from the minutes of the meetings of the new “municipalités de canton”, it appears that most village delegates simply neglected to attend. See, on this topic, Woloch, “State and the Villages”, pp. 225-6; Jessenne, *Pouvoir au village*, pp. 110-21; and Jones, *Politics*, pp. 244-6.

<sup>57</sup> See A.P. vol. 65, 1 juin 1793, p. 667; also Aulard, *Recueil*, vol. 11, p. 303 and vol. 12, p. 339-40; see also pp. 93-95, below. The question of whether counter-revolutionary opinion arose from a lack of information will be discussed further in chapter IV.

<sup>58</sup> This method of transporting mail continued through the revolutionary decade, although the increasing volume necessitated extra vehicles devoted expressly to the post. However, the combination of travel and mail transport continued into the nineteenth century, as illustrated in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*: “Le service des postes d’Arras à Montreuil-sur-mer se faisait encore, à cette époque par de petites malles du temps de l’Empire. Ces malles étaient des cabriolets à deux roues, tapissés de cuire fauve au dedans, suspendus sur des ressorts à pompe, et n’ayant que deux places, l’une pour le courrier, l’autre pour le voyageur.” I (7) v, Gohin (ed.), p. 326.



placed a tremendous stress on the system by greatly increasing the proportion of mail destined for localities without a distribution office.

Furthermore, even had the postal system been sufficiently extensive to undertake the delivery of mail to every rural locality, its effectiveness would still have been limited by the state of the road network. As described in chapter I, only the major arteries had been well maintained under the monarchy, and the numerous reports drawn up by state engineers during the revolutionary decade remark upon the consequences for communications of such a disastrous state of affairs.<sup>59</sup> In his report on the general situation in the departments in early 1793, the minister of the Interior Jean-Marie Roland wrote that whether due to previous neglect, excessive use or the destructive effects of the elements, the roads everywhere were “dans un état déplorable”, and that in many departments, they were drawing “les réclamations les plus vives” from those who used them. While Roland’s long-term recommendations involved better maintenance, at the time of writing, he estimated that “la plupart [aur]ont besoin d’être repris entièrement.”<sup>60</sup> Departmental administrations, anxious to secure national funding for local roadworks, sent multiple petitions and complaints which confirmed and augmented the deputies’ suspicions that the improvement of the state of the road network would constitute a phenomenal project, in both scope and expense. The administrators of the Lot-et-Garonne, where the terrain was perhaps the least problematic of the five departments studied here, filed a printed report in 1790 on the situation of local roads which aimed to convince the National Assembly that in fact, their situation was among the worst in France:

L’état de ruine des routes qui traversent le département du Lot-et-Garonne est véritablement affligeant... Il n’existe dans l’étendue du département...qu’un très petit nombre de communications: celles que l’on y rencontre, ont généralement été mal dirigées, mal construites; et les désordres résultant du système arbitraire et tyrannique des corvées en rachat, en ont accéléré la ruine. Nous ne rappellerons aucune circonstance de ces maux passés dont les peuples de cette contrée ont si longtemps gémi. Nous chercherons seulement à fixer l’attention de l’administration actuelle sur le moyen de procurer à ces contrées, les avantages qui résulteront des communications faciles.<sup>61</sup>

In a second petition dated one year later, the same administrators claimed that “nul département n’est aussi dépourvu de communications.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 1L475; A.D. Ariège, 1L168; A.D. Haute-Garonne, 1L977; A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, L639; A.N. AF II\* 34.

<sup>60</sup> A.P. vol. 56, p. 676, 9 janvier 1793.

<sup>61</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, L475-2, Observations sur l’état de situation des routes, and (insert) Essai et notes pour servir à un projet de rapport sur les objets relatifs à la confection des routes, 1790.

<sup>62</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, L475-5, État général des grandes routes...du département de Lot-et-Garonne, 29 août 1791.



While the authors of such reports may well have been opportunistic in their exaggeration of the direness of the situation, it is nevertheless true that the majority of paved roads, and indeed, of roads in good condition, were to be found in the north, while the Massif central and the remote south-west and south-east were conspicuously lacking in reliable communications routes.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, while there existed many routes leading from small towns to rural localities – the time-worn paths used by villagers to take their wares to market – the provinces remained extremely poor in cross-country roads, connecting villages and even towns to each other, a fact which presented a practical obstacle to the continuous communication required by the new order. Writing of the Corbières, a hilly region of the south-western Pyrénées-Orientales, Peter McPhee notes that the area is “surrounded on all sides by waterways and ancient communication routes”, yet “there has never been a road of any consequence through the tangled landscape of the Corbières themselves.”<sup>64</sup> Peter Jones, similarly, highlights poor communications as a key factor in the slow political development of rural society in the southern *Massif central*.<sup>65</sup> On the one hand, it is perhaps unwise to generalise about conditions which led to the isolation of rural communities; some parts of the south, especially near large cities such as Toulouse and Marseilles, received news quite quickly, and the fact that Burgundy has been described as “densement irriguée” with roadways prevents us from making a generalization about mountainous regions.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, the overall state of the road network in France at the beginning of the Revolution was poor indeed, making this the most evident obstacle to be overcome if the deputies were to achieve their aims of communicating large quantities of political information to every commune in the nation.

### Government Initiatives to Overcome Obstacles

#### Improvements to the road network

The emphasis placed by the national assemblies on communication resulted in a period of intense engineering activity, as improvements to the institutional and physical

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<sup>63</sup> Arbellot and Lepetit, *Routes et communications*, p. 18; Lepetit, *Chemins de terre*, pp. 49-51; Vovelle, *Découverte de la politique*, p. 105.

<sup>64</sup> Peter McPhee, “Peasant Revolution, Winegrowing and the Environment: The Corbières Region of Languedoc, 1780-1830”, *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 29 (1992), pp. 153-69; citation p. 153.

<sup>65</sup> Jones, *Politics*.

<sup>66</sup> The expression is Vovelle’s, *Découverte de la politique*, p. 107.



infrastructure were given a high priority.<sup>67</sup> Numerous surveys and inquiries were carried out, with the aim of determining the state of communications throughout the nation and thus pinpointing areas deserving of attention.<sup>68</sup> In one of the earliest of these inquiries, sent out by decree of 2 July 1790, the *Assemblée nationale* requested that every town, village and hamlet report on the condition of the roads in its area.<sup>69</sup> The survey consisted of six series of questions, each of which dealt with a different aspect of the communications network: one series concerned navigable rivers and canals,<sup>70</sup> while the remaining five addressed roads. The Assembly was interested in the state of the “grandes routes”, as well as *chemins* both “non pavés” and “vicinaux”; one series of questions even invited respondents to identify “chemins à ouvrir”. However, the category which headed up the questionnaire, revealing the priority accorded to communication, was the “routes de poste”.

Indeed, the commissioners sent into the provinces, and particularly the infamous *représentants-en-mission*, commented frequently on communication networks, and stressed that if the *marche de la Révolution* were to continue unobstructed, improvements would have to be made. Repeatedly, deputies and commissioners addressed the Convention or the Committee of Public Safety, relating how decrees arrived terribly late in the countryside and demanding that the situation be improved. The first letter of Deydier, who had been sent into north-western France to speed up the fabrication of cannon, is typical:

Je suis arrivé ici aujourd’hui à 5 heures du matin, après avoir couru jour et nuit, sans autre halte que trois heures, ce qui vous étonnera sans doute, mais il était impossible d’aller plus vite; les routes [sont] abominables; les chevaux, ou plutôt des masettes<sup>71</sup>, ne mangeant presque point d’avoine, peuvent à peine se soutenir; enfin nous n’avons pu, de la ville d’Angers à Nantes, aller qu’au pas. Vous ne vous faites pas d’idée, citoyens collègues, de l’état où se trouvent les postes, ce qui sera un grand obstacle pour faire expédier par cette voie les objets dont vous m’avez chargé; mais je prends avec mes collègues qui sont ici toutes les mesures les plus efficaces pour les faire parvenir, soit par la poste, soit par d’autres moyens

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<sup>67</sup> See Jean-Marcel Goger, “L’Attitude du pouvoir politique vis-à-vis du réseau routier méridional de 1789 à 1815”, in *Les Routes du Sud de la France*, pp. 273-93.

<sup>68</sup> See for example, A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, L132; A.D. Haute-Garonne, 1L977, pièces 44-45.

<sup>69</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, L475-1.

<sup>70</sup> Although river navigation was much improved during the eighteenth century, it continued to be used primarily for the transport of goods rather than of news. The Dordogne received particular attention in the revolutionary era; see Cocula-Vallières, *Un fleuve et des hommes*; Arbellot and Lepetit, *Routes et communications*, pp. 25, 28-9; and A.D. Dordogne, 1L585. On the Garonne, see Janine Garrisson-Estèbe and Marc Ferro (eds.), *Une histoire de la Garonne* (Paris, 1982).

<sup>71</sup> A ‘masette’ or ‘mazette’ was a ‘petit cheval méchant’, according to the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 1<sup>re</sup> edition, 1694. My thanks to David Colon (Univ. Paris X-Nanterre), Giulio Romero Passerin d’Entrèves (Univ. Paris I-Sorbonne) and Joël Surcouf (Archives départementales de la Mayenne) for responding to my query on the internet discussion group H-France.







équivalents.<sup>72</sup>

Ironically, the city from which Deydier sent this letter – Nantes – was quite close to Paris in comparison with many parts of the nation, and letters from the southern regions included in this study describe an even more dire situation. Pinet *aîné*, who was responsible for the *levée en masse* in the Dordogne in the summer of 1793, wrote that the *relai de poste* at La Coquille was “absolument dégarnie” to the point that “son service se fait avec des boeufs”. Pinet demanded that the Committee of Public Safety remedy the situation, for “rien ne peut être plus pressant dans l’intérêt de la chose publique.”<sup>73</sup>

Granted, improvements to the road system were not always motivated solely by the need for better communications networks. Indeed, the government was equally if not more interested in the ability to transport foodstuffs and supplies, particularly after the start of the revolutionary wars. However, the underlying implication – that incomplete, precarious roads would produce an unreliable postal system and thus a less-efficient administration – was always present. In his report of January 1793, Roland described in glowing terms the reasons behind a new project for improvements to the road system:

Maintenant que nous avons déterminé le mode de notre gouvernement, nous devons nous occuper de tout ce qui peut contribuer au bonheur et à la gloire de la République. Un des meilleurs moyens pour y parvenir est, sans contredit, celui qui tendra à perfectionner ces utiles communications qui doivent faire circuler l’abondance et porter une nouvelle vie dans toutes les parties de ce vaste Empire.<sup>74</sup>

Further on in the report, Roland enumerated six specific benefits: “circulation de denrées” was last in the list, with facility of administration, safety of movement, and unification of the country coming first.<sup>75</sup> The improvement of the infrastructure in general, it was understood, would improve all manner of exchange and communication, bringing the provinces ever more tightly into the sphere of influence of the capital.

With the pursuit of these objectives in mind, the road improvement system itself received considerable attention from the deputies of the revolutionary governments. The *Corps des Ponts et chaussées*, instituted in the early modern period but heavily influenced by the Enlightenment,<sup>76</sup> was re-organised at the time of the territorial and administrative

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<sup>72</sup> Lettre de Deydier, représentant pour la fabrication des canons de marine dans l’Eure, l’Orne et la Loire-Inférieure, au Comité de Salut Public, datée de Nantes, 2 ventôse an II; cited in Aulard, *Recueil*, vol. 11, p. 303.

<sup>73</sup> A.N. AF II 168, Correspondance des représentants-en-mission.

<sup>74</sup> A.P. vol. 56, 9 janv 1793, p. 676.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 680.

<sup>76</sup> Although the institution of the *Ponts et chaussées* dates back to the sixteenth century, it was greatly improved during the regency of 1715-23 and the reign of Louis XV, with the founding of the professional engineer corps and the school. For a contemporary assessment, see Antoine-Louis Chaumont de la Millière,



changes of 1789-90, with control over regional projects falling to the departments.<sup>77</sup> This decentralization of government initiatives in the area of communications was intended to address local needs more effectively: departmental administrators were authorised to appoint as many road engineers as they deemed necessary and to direct their efforts where they saw fit. More importantly, the much-despised and largely inefficient *corvée*, or forced labour service, which had in any case long since ceased to exist in *pays d'état* such as Languedoc, was officially abolished and replaced with new methods of funding roadworks. Initially, it was hoped that road improvements would be financed by an allocation of money taxes, but the impossibility of collecting the required sums in the early years of the Revolution led first the Legislative Assembly and then the Convention to subsidise the projects, notably on those routes judged to be of particular strategic importance. As a result, an uncomfortable balance was struck between the decentralizing tendencies of the early Revolution – for the departments continued to be allowed to manage local repairs – and the centralizing impulse of the increasingly radical assembly, whose deputies were adamant that the maintenance of key communications routes be the responsibility of centrally-appointed commissioners.<sup>78</sup>

In spite of the fact that roads of national importance continued to top the list of priorities, the state of the *chemins vicinaux*, or local byways, constituted a perennial topic of concern for the revolutionary governments.<sup>79</sup> As the departmental administrators of the Haute-Garonne pointed out, in terms of transport at least, it was “les communications particulières qui rendent les grandes routes utiles”, for without good local byways, agricultural products would not even reach the larger, better roads and enter into circulation.<sup>80</sup> Repairs to connecting roads were most often inspired by the petitions and complaints of local villages, which were taken seriously at higher levels. In August 1793, for example, the municipal council of the mountain community of Soulan, in the Ariège, petitioned the district administration to organise repairs on the road which led from their

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“Mémoire sur le Département des Ponts et Chaussées” (Paris, 1790). See also André Brunot and Roger Coquand, *Le Corps des Ponts et Chaussées* (Paris, 1982); Jean Petot, *Histoire de l'administration des Ponts et Chaussées, 1599-1815* (Paris, 1958); and Lepetit, *Chemins de terre*.

<sup>77</sup> The transfer of control over the *ponts et chaussées* to the departments was included in the decree of 22 décembre 1789. Rachel Canini has shown how the important job of assessing road building projects and beginning work in the provinces was largely conferred upon uneducated *commis*, with the *ingénieurs* arriving late in the process: “Routes terrestres”, pp. 151-3.

<sup>78</sup> Arbellot and Lepetit, *Routes et communications*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>79</sup> Woloch, *The New Regime*, pp. 164-72.

<sup>80</sup> A.D. Haute-Garonne, 1L977, pièce 2, Proclamation du département relatif aux chemins vicinaux de communauté à communauté, 22 novembre et 13 décembre 1790.



village to intersect with the “grand chemin” from Massat, the nearest market town, to St-Girons, the district *chef-lieu*. The councillors’ claims that the mountain valley was “un lieu commerçant et fertile,” and that the road in question was “absolument nécessaire... [parce qu’il lui ouvre toutes les communications”, were seconded by a communal petition from nearby villages, and permission to begin the roadworks was granted by the Minister of the Interior, albeit only five years later.<sup>81</sup> As with the selection of canton and district seats, securing a new road guaranteed economic viability and prestige for local market towns, and protected individual villages against becoming isolated.

However, while the *Comité des Postes, transports et messageries* valued and encouraged local efforts to fill out and complete the road network, they were unable to pay for repairs to minor roads. As the department of the Hautes-Pyrénées was told in response to a request for funding for a local project, only *grandes routes* were to be financed by the *Ponts et chaussées*; in the case of “un embranchement, utile seulement aux administrés, c’est à eux [d’]y pourvoir...”.<sup>82</sup> Even at the departmental level, administrators were hesitant to dole out the huge sums of money required for a complete redress of the local road network. A circular sent out by the department of the Ariège in the Year V requested communities to indicate which lanes were used frequently and which, alternatively, could be disregarded; indeed, the letter implied that the maintenance of infrequently used roads would only reduce the wealth of the Republic, by occupying land that could be used for agricultural purposes.<sup>83</sup> Several years earlier, the department of the Dordogne made a similar distinction, electing to pay for certain roads to be repaired while leaving others to deteriorate. They reasoned that the latter were rarely used by any except a few peasants, and that moreover, they were so isolated that the cost of transporting building materials to them would be extremely high.<sup>84</sup>

Indeed, while the revolutionary decade saw a remarkable number of new road projects, the organisation and sometimes the financing of such projects was left largely to local initiative, with the work to be carried out by *ateliers de charité*. The subject of renewed interest in the last decades of the *ancien régime* and in the early years of the

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<sup>81</sup> A.D. Ariège, 1L168, Extraits des registres de l’administration départementale de l’Ariège, 23 août 1793 et 20 fructidor an V; Mémoire du Ministre de l’Intérieur, 15 nivôse an VI.

<sup>82</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, L639, Lettre de l’administration de la caisse de l’extraordinaire au département, relatif à la route projetée à travers la forêt de Carsan, 28 juillet 1792. Even during the radically interventionist period in Year II, when all public works were to be financed by the state, *chemins vicinaux* remained excluded.

<sup>83</sup> A.D. Ariège, 1L168, 23 messidor an V.

<sup>84</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 4L209, Administration du district d’Excideuil; see, for example, 13 mai 1792.



Revolution as a profitable form of poor relief in the countryside, the *ateliers* have been relatively understudied;<sup>85</sup> yet a brief survey of archival references to “travaux publics” at the district, canton, and municipal levels suggests that *ateliers* were functioning near most villages on a fairly continuous basis.<sup>86</sup> As the author of a report from the district of Excideuil in the Dordogne put it, using *ateliers de charité* to complete road repairs had “deux grands avantages...favoriser le commerce et faire cesser la mendicité.”<sup>87</sup> However, while the use of *ateliers* seemed promising in some ways, it was problematic for several reasons.<sup>88</sup> First of all, with all initiative left to local authorities and no real means of constraint, projects were often undertaken haphazardly, and operations were frequently stalled or halted altogether by a lack of local cooperation or by quibbling over exact boundaries of responsibility. Moreover, even where repairs were successfully completed, the quality and type of work varied from one section of road to the next, as each commune undertook a relatively small portion. Finally, in the unstable atmosphere of the revolutionary era, those projects which were successfully initiated were constantly being interrupted by harvest failures, counter-revolution and foreign war. In the end, very few new roads were actually built between 1789 and 1799, and most of the existing ones continued to deteriorate.<sup>89</sup>

### Improvements to the postal system

Nevertheless, the condition of the road network was not solely responsible for the state of communications in France. The institutional means by which material circulated was also key, and throughout the revolutionary decade, the government worked to improve the speed, reliability, and effectiveness of the postal service, with the aim of establishing

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<sup>85</sup> On *ateliers de charité* in the *ancien régime*, see Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 182-93, and William Olejniczak, “Working the Body of the Poor: The *ateliers de charité* in late Eighteenth-Century France”, *Journal of Social History*, 24 (1990), pp. 87-107. On how this type of labour was harnessed during the revolutionary era to improve the road network, see Alan Forrest, *The French Revolution and the Poor* (Oxford, 1991), chapter 6, and Colin Jones, *Charity and bienfaisance: The Treatment of the Poor in the Montpellier Region, 1740-1815* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 134-6. Road-building constituted the major activity undertaken by *ateliers* in both eras, with activities such as textile work, bridge repair, saltpetre recovery and building projects rounding out the available employment.

<sup>86</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2L15; A.D. Dordogne, 2L130, 2L132, 3L86-87, 4L209, 5L121, 8L133; A.D. Haute-Garonne, 2L4239; A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, L628, 648, 674, 718, 752, 763, 792, 815; and A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, L694, 724, 739, 759, 775.

<sup>87</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 4L209, Observations... s.l.n.d.

<sup>88</sup> Forrest, *French Revolution and the Poor*, pp. 110-3; Woloch, *The New Regime*, pp. 164-71.

<sup>89</sup> Arbellot and Lepetit, *Routes et communications*, p. 15. Between 1789 and 1815, the proportion of roads needing to be fixed rose from 20% to 50%. Department advisory councils, consulted on the issue in 1801, reported that the *chemins vicinaux* had been terribly neglected, to the extent that they were virtually impassable in inclement weather; several warned that if the situation was not remedied, communications could be interrupted altogether. See also Woloch, *The New Regime*, pp. 164-9.



better communication with its constituents in the provinces.<sup>90</sup> It was not that the postal service had been inefficient before: indeed, the *poste* was an effective institution under the *ancien régime*, and had been steadily improving, with the greatest growth occurring in the eighteenth century and particularly in the final decade. Its reorganization was therefore not so much intrinsically necessary, as it was made inevitable by the changing circumstances of the Revolution: namely, the increase in both the volume of deliveries and in the number of administrative centres. The *Intendance des postes*, which had for all intents and purposes been a private enterprise, was abolished on 8 July 1790 and replaced, after nearly a year of debate in the National Assembly, by a government-operated public service known as the *Directoire des postes*.<sup>91</sup> In addition to these institutional reforms, the physical network of post offices and distribution centres was expanded and improved, in order to respond to the greater demand. As Charles Poujol wrote of the department of the Oise, “l’isolement des communes”, which had already been considered an “inconvenient sérieux” on the eve of Revolution, became even more noticeable after 1789.<sup>92</sup> By March 1791, the newly-formed *Comité des postes, transports et messageries* had redrawn the postal delivery routes to include all of the departmental and district *chef-lieux*, raising the number of distribution offices from the 1320 which had been in existence in 1789 to 1466 by the Year III, and to 1494 by the Year V.<sup>93</sup>

From the offices of government in Paris to the *place publique* of each of the more than 40,000 communes in France, laws and other printed matter followed a long and convoluted path which was modeled upon that used during the *ancien régime*. Mail

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<sup>90</sup> In spite of the intrinsic importance of the postal service to communications and administration, very little historical research has been done on the topic. Eugène Vaillé’s six-volume treatise, though published in 1953 and “couronné” by the Académie française, stops in 1789, before the development of the postal system into a modern, effective institution: *Histoire générale des postes françaises* (6 vols., Paris, 1953). Other work on the institution has been almost entirely limited to the short publications of learned amateurs and local historians, and souvenir books drafted by curators at the *Musée de la Poste* in Paris. While these works do contribute valuable detail and local examples, a scholarly study of the institution and its role in society remains to be written.

<sup>91</sup> Legrand, “Instruction générale sur le service des postes.” (Paris: Imprimerie de P. D. Pierres, s.d. [1792]). See also the early deliberations of the *Directoire des postes*, A.N. F<sup>90</sup> 20012 and 20013. In fact, the nature of the institution, and thus its title, was changed seven times over the ten-year period: at different points it was a *régie* (state-owned company), a *ferme* (business leased from the government), an *agence nationale*, a *commission*, and an *administration*. See Jean-François Pouey, “La poste aux lettres”, *Lavedan et Pays toy (Société d’Études des Sept-vallées, Hautes-Pyrénées)*, 12 (1990), pp. 55-64, and Robert Rolland, “Postes et messageries pendant la période révolutionnaire”, *Revue des P. T.T. de France*, 35 (1980), pp. 51-9.

<sup>92</sup> Poujol, “Les antécédents”, p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Arbellot and Lepetit, *Routes et communications*, p. 39; Rapport du Conseil des Cinq Cents, an V, cited in Rolland, “Postes et messageries”, p. 51. Distribution offices were typically located in sizeable market towns and other *bourgs* along larger roads. In practice, this meant that nearly all district seats and a fair proportion of cantonal ones contained a post office.



deliveries were carried from Paris by “*courriers de première section*” along the *grandes routes* to the largest cities, and then by “*courriers de deuxième section*” to the *chef-lieux* of the departments. From there, a *commis* sorted the mail and arranged for it to be delivered to *bureaux de poste* and to offices in smaller localities, still called *bureaux de distribution* or *entrepôts de dépêches* depending upon the region.<sup>94</sup> However, the responsibility of the postal service ended there. Not only would delivery to individual villages have required a far larger workforce than was available, but as we have seen, the conditions of the local road network left much to be desired. Piotay, the postmaster of the *relais* at Mussidan, in the Dordogne, related in the Year VIII that postal deliveries were actually threatened by the lack of road repairs:

...ayant perdu un cheval dans un des précipices sur la route de Monpont en conduisant le courrier de la malle, je suis donc été forcé (*sic*) de retenir le courrier pendant la nuit quoique je n'en aie le droit, que vu le mauvais chemin, et le peu de soin que mettent les fermiers et les brassiers à raccomoder ses précipices, veuillez donc citoyen employer tous les moyens que la loi met en vos mains pour obliger ces personnes à réparer les trous et précipices sans quoi vous pouvez renoncer aux courriers.<sup>95</sup>

While Piotay's account may be more humorous than most, it is far from atypical: rural administrators were in constant conflict with peasants and landowners who usurped country roads to plant an extra row of crops, or who refused to clear the drainage ditches, causing the surface of the road to wash away.<sup>96</sup> Consequently, the *diligences* would not even venture on to the smaller, often hazardous roads which connected villages to larger centres; once material had reached the nearest distribution point, it was up to the addressee to arrange for its collection. To cite one example, in the department of the Dordogne, there were only about 15-20 distribution offices for some 700 municipalities: from there, rural communities themselves had to ensure that they remained in communication with the outside world.<sup>97</sup>

Surprisingly, perhaps, ensure it they did: an entire network of foot messengers, variously described as *messagers*, *porteurs*, or *piétons*, was established to deliver the

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<sup>94</sup> See Rolland, “Postes et messageries”, pp. 52-4, and the map of the Cantal reproduced in Arbellot and Lepetit, “Routes et communications”, p. 45.

<sup>95</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 1L501, pièce 23, Lettre manuscrite de Piotay, maître de poste, à l'administration départementale.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Woloch, *The New Regime*, pp. 164-9. Rachel Canini, a T.E.R. student under the supervision of Michel Taillefer at the University of Toulouse-II, adopted a somewhat resentful – if justified – tone with regard to this topic in her *mémoire*. “Les paysans”, she wrote, “n’avaient aucun respect pour les ouvrages publics, et déployaient une ingéniosité sans limite pour les transformer en choses à leur usage propre.” “Routes terrestres”, p. 154.

<sup>97</sup> *Calendrier raisonné du département de la Dordogne pour l'année 1792*, A.D. Dordogne, P 01/2 (rayon ouvert).



material. Although this method of postal delivery was merely the “mode d’emploi” in an era when transportation by foot was the only option for the majority, it also demonstrates that rural municipalities placed considerable importance upon the arrival of political news.<sup>98</sup> In fact, the use of foot messengers was common both in the *ancien régime* and in the early years of the Revolution, although until the reorganization of municipal government under the Year III constitution, the practice remained largely one of local improvisation.<sup>99</sup> Typically, village councils would pay for an individual to pick up and deliver messages up to three times per week at the nearest post office.<sup>100</sup> In the areas studied, the duty often fell into the job description of a permanent *valet de ville*, a sort of general messenger or *concierge* employed by the municipality. In other instances, openings were advertised by posted notices and awarded through an *adjudication au rabais*, in which the position was auctioned to the individual who would perform the services for the lowest salary (see figure 2-4, next page).<sup>101</sup>

However, many communes in the regions studied, particularly in the Pyrenees, complained that they were too poor to hire a messenger, and either went without – being forced to send essential material by the more expensive *exprès* – or applied to their department for extra funds. The departmental administrators of the Ariège found a unique solution in the Year VI, after being informed that many municipalities, too poor to hire a *piéton*, were leaving their official correspondence unclaimed at the post office. Henceforth, the *Directoire* of the department declared, the *gendarmes* responsible for the repression of brigands in the countryside would also carry the mail whilst on their rounds.<sup>102</sup> Clearly, the dependence upon locally organised messengers was not ideal; the persons hired were

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<sup>98</sup> Charles Poujol points out that while the messenger system worked well for communication between villages and the nearest urban centre, it was notably weak in cross-country links between villages, illustrating the fact that it was designed for the official correspondence between the governing and the governed; “Les antécédents”. See also Arbellot and Lepetit, *Routes et communications*, p. 45.

<sup>99</sup> Arbellot and Lepetit, *Routes et communications*, p. 81. Few historians discuss the existence of *piétons* before the laws of the Year V in any depth, neglecting the fact that this decree and, indeed, the *poste rurale* of 1830 were merely the institutionalisation of the status quo. Jacques Lichière, in his article “Piétons et messagers”, goes so far as to state that *piétons* were created only in Year V (*Bulletin de la Société Internationale d’Histoire Postale*, 5-6 (1963), pp. 16-18). Exceptions to this rule include Poujol, “Les antécédents”, and Marino Carnévalé-Mauzan, *Histoire de la poste en milieu rural* (Grenoble, 1994).

<sup>100</sup> The messenger’s salary came out of the municipal budget, which was paid by all inhabitants as a type of tax. However, not all villages could afford to hire a messenger. The commune of Galapian, in the Lot-et-Garonne, decided a messenger was necessary only in ventôse an II (A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Edép. Galapian 1D2); other localities sent ‘*exprès*’ when necessary (A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Edép. Villeneuve-de-Duras 1D1, 29 août 1790; A.D. Ariège, 104Edép D1 (Sentein), 25 brumaire an II).

<sup>101</sup> See also A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, L865, Délibérations de l’administration municipale de Cahuzac; Établissement d’un messenger, 29 messidor an VIII; and Pouey, “La poste aux lettres”, p. 59.

<sup>102</sup> A.D. Ariège, 1L167 (Administration du département: Postes); 5L22, 5L65, 5L159, 5L188 (Administration des municipalités de canton, postes; Belesta, Lavelanet, St. Ybars and Varilhes, respectively), Year VI.



Figure 2-4

Advertisement for a *porteur de dépêches*,  
Department of the Ariège, canton of St. Ybars, year V

avis

Les citoyens qui voudront se charger  
de porter et retirer les dépêches des  
Bureaux Des Les Postes sous jadis, se  
se trouver le 17 du Present mois à  
une heure ou d'après midi à St  
Ybars Dans le lieu ordinaire des  
séances De Administration  
municipale qui fera l'adjudication  
au Rabais.

Interv. president



sometimes transient, undependable individuals who were easily discouraged by the poor rate of pay and the overwhelming amount of mail. Nevertheless, this messenger system was essential for the delivery of official *communiqués*, for not until 1830 would the government establish a comprehensive system of mail distribution in the countryside, known as the *poste rurale*, in which mail was hand-delivered to every commune by nationally-employed *facteurs*.

The minutes and correspondence of various government officials and of the *Comité des postes, transports et messageries* in particular show a sustained concern with the ability of the postal system to deliver political material, again demonstrating the high priority given to communication with the provinces throughout the decade. As Roland explained to the president of the Convention on 27 September 1792, “[le service] des Postes, dans la plus petite des villes, est un chaînon de la chaîne immense à laquelle tiennent tous les mouvements et toutes les relations de la France.”<sup>103</sup> The establishment of postal “links” with remote locations was of particular concern, and on 2 April 1791, the *Directoire* decided to again reorganise its service to the departments, “en vue d’assurer des communications aux bureaux qui par leur situation géographique se trouveraient isolés.”<sup>104</sup> Two months later, on 21 June, the National Assembly passed a general decree that “le service de la poste aux lettres ne doit souffrir aucune interruption,”<sup>105</sup> and a circular letter from the *Comité* to all post office directors in Year III highlighted the speedy delivery of laws as their primary reason for being, suggesting that they enlist the aid of local administrators if necessary to successfully complete their task.<sup>106</sup> In the wake of the south-western royalist insurrection of Year VII, the potential consequences of poor communications became clear. As the cantonal municipality of Salies-du-Salat, in the southernmost district of Saint-Gaudens, wrote to the department,

Nous devons fixer votre attention sur la négligence qui existe dans ces contrées sur le service de la poste aux lettres. Dans les circonstances actuelles le moindre retard provoque les plus vives sollicitudes, nous en avons l’expérience.<sup>107</sup>

Such disturbing testimonies worked to convince the authorities that the interruption of communications should be avoided at all costs.

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<sup>103</sup> Cited in Rolland, “Postes et messageries”, p. 51.

<sup>104</sup> A.N. F<sup>90</sup> 20012, fol.5, Délibérations du Directoire des Postes, 2 avril 1791.

<sup>105</sup> A.N. F<sup>90</sup> 20368, Divers concernant l’ensemble du pays; Décret de l’Assemblée nationale, 21 juin 1791.

<sup>106</sup> A.D. Haute-Garonne, 1L778, pièce 33, Lettre circulaire de l’Agence nationale des Postes aux Directeurs de poste, 16 frimaire an III.

<sup>107</sup> A.D. Haute-Garonne, 1L778, pièce 53, Lettre du président de l’administration municipale du canton de Salies-du-Salat au département, 28 fructidor an VII.



The improvements made to the network of postal routes and distribution offices were particularly beneficial to the south-western departments studied here (see Figure 2-5, following page). Michel Vovelle has argued that “plusieurs Frances se dessinent en fonction de l’inégale pénétration des nouvelles, reproduisant, mais avec des nuances significatives, la spatialisation que l’on pouvait induire du tracé des grandes routes,”<sup>108</sup> and indeed, apart from the more urbanised and developed areas of the south-eastern Mediterranean coast, the south-west was disadvantaged overall with respect to communications at the beginning of the Revolution. However, the establishment of postal distribution offices in all district towns greatly expanded the coverage of the previously sparsely served areas in the south and west.<sup>109</sup> In the regions studied here, nine new post offices were created, in addition to countless distribution points and routes covered by government-appointed messengers.<sup>110</sup> The number of weekly collections was relatively low compared with other regions in France: mail was collected thrice weekly from three-quarters of the post offices, including all of those in the Dordogne and Lot-et-Garonne, with approximately half of those in the departments bordering the Pyrenees having only two weekly pick-ups. Nevertheless, this level of activity represents a considerable increase from the *ancien régime*, when mail was only picked up once a week. Moreover, such figures give an impression primarily of the volume of outgoing correspondence, although mail from higher administrations was normally delivered at the same time as outgoing mail was picked up.<sup>111</sup> In summary, the physical expansion of the postal network did much to improve communication in the south-west.

### Limits to the degree of improvement

However, in spite of all of the efforts of the administration to improve both the postal system and the road network, neither could be transformed overnight, and the legacy of the Revolution in both areas was somewhat mixed. Whereas the position of postmaster had been a lucrative one under the *ancien régime*, sought after by local elites, the reformed

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<sup>108</sup> Vovelle, *Découverte de la politique*, p. 107.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Arbellot and Lepetit, *Routes et communications*, p. 32.

<sup>110</sup> Dordogne (Nontron, Monpazier), Lot-et-Garonne (Lauzun, Monflanquin, Montech); Hautes-Pyrénées (Vic, LaBarthe-de-Neste, Lourdes, Argelès). For regional studies, see Lafon, *Histoire de la poste aux lettres en Périgord*; Fernand Thouvenon, “La poste en Lot-et-Garonne du Consulat aux Trois Glorieuses”, in *Villeneuve-sur-Lot et l'Agenais, Histoire-Art-Géographie-Economie. Actes des XIV<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> Congrès d'études régionales tenus à Villeneuve-sur-Lot les 13-15 mai 1961* (Agen, 1962), pp. 323-340; Roger Armengaud and Claude Bailhé, *Les Pyrénées au temps des diligences et des postillons: recherches et légendes* (Toulouse, 1981), and Pouey, “La poste aux lettres”.

<sup>111</sup> Indeed, local administrations would often schedule their meetings so that they fell just after the mail delivery. See Poujol, “Les antécédents”, p. 4.



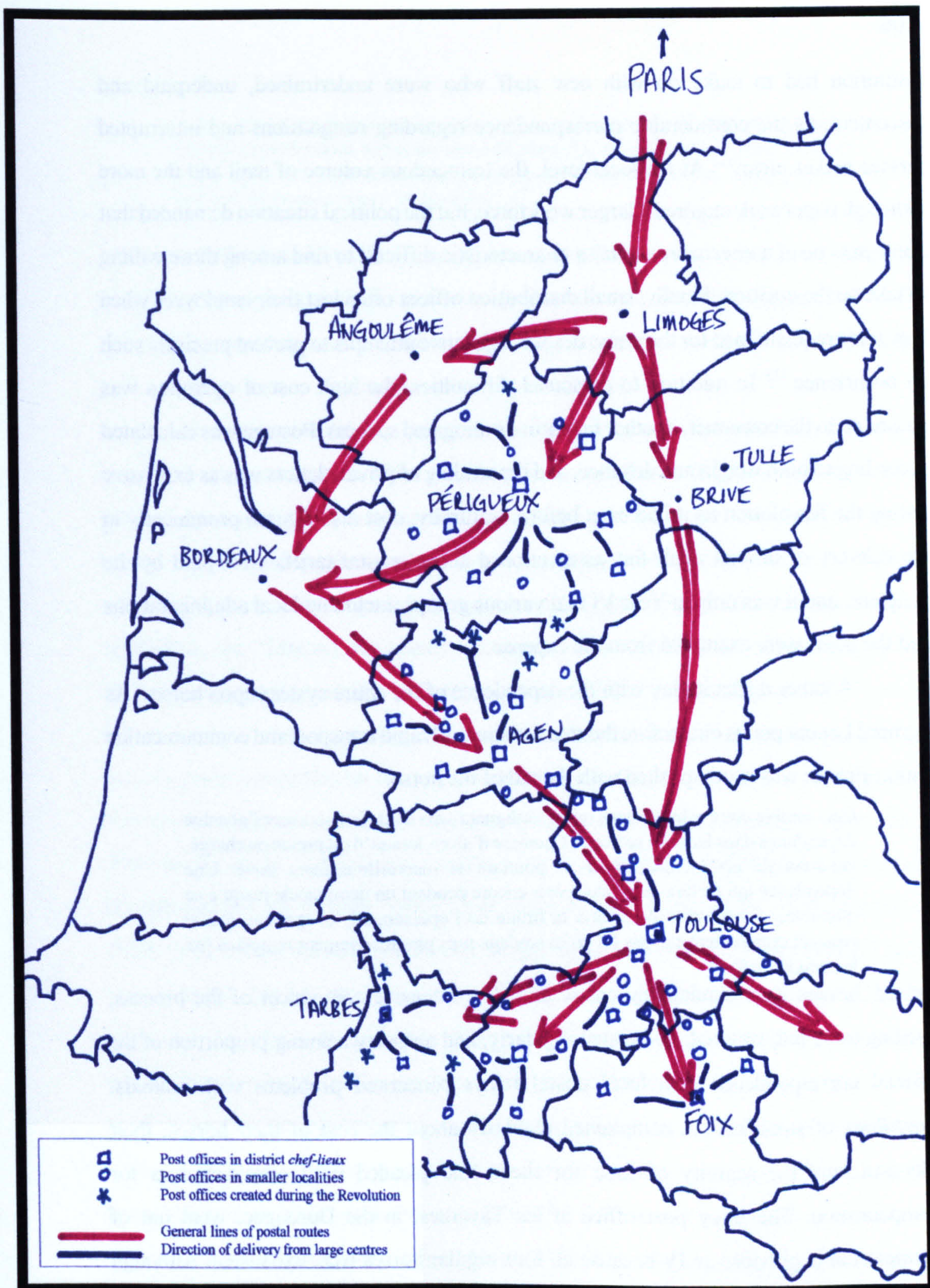


Figure 2-5  
Distribution of Post Offices in the Regions Studied (an III)

Source: Data assembled from Holerbac, *Manuel des postes aux lettres, imprimé le 1<sup>er</sup> prairial an III de la République française, une et indivisible...* (Paris: chez l'auteur, 1795); B.N. 8° LF186-13; microfiche 20294. Map adapted from "Les départements, districts et cantons en 1790", carte no.5, *Le territoire: Les limites administratives*, vol. 5, part 2 of the series, *Atlas de la Révolution française* (Paris: Éditions de l'É.H.É.S.S., 1989); map established by Serge Bonin, after P. Dumez and P.G. Chanlaire, *Atlas national de France, 1790-93*.



institution had to make do with new staff who were undertrained, underpaid and discontent, as the considerable correspondence regarding resignations and interrupted service makes clear.<sup>112</sup> At the local level, the tremendous volume of mail and the more thorough paperwork required a larger workforce, but the political situation demanded that applicants be of a *civisme reconnu*, a characteristic difficult to find among those willing to take on the position. Finally, small distribution offices often lost their employees when they were requisitioned for the army, despite legislative attempts to prevent precisely such an occurrence.<sup>113</sup> In addition to personnel difficulties, the high cost of operation was passed on to the consumer, another factor in its mitigated success. Postage was calculated according to both weight and distance, and the sending of private letters was as expensive during the Revolution as it had been before. Naturally, cost also figured prominently in the delivery of official mail, for, as mentioned above, postal tariffs were paid by the recipient, and it was only in Year VI that various groups, including local administrations and the poor, were exempted from the expense.

Another difficulty lay with the dependence of the entire system upon horses. As Bernard Lepetit points out, before the steam engine, all rapid transport and communication within France was accomplished with the aid of the horse:

Cela semble une évidence, mais on ne soulignera sans doute jamais assez l'absolue dépendance dans laquelle se trouve l'homme d'alors, lorsqu'il est pressé ou chargé, vis-à-vis de cet animal fragile et pourtant si merveilleusement doué. Une dépendance qui ne fera que s'exaspérer encore pendant un demi-siècle jusqu'à ce que, avec des chevaux poussés à la limite de l'épuisement, ce système qui se reposait entièrement sur eux fût enfin soulagé puis progressivement remplacé par le chemin de fer.<sup>114</sup>

Indeed, horses were a relatively costly and time-intensive component of the process, needing to be fed, watered, and rested regularly, and an overwhelming proportion of the official correspondence with local postal relays concerned problems with animals. *Postillons* of small offices complained regularly about the cost of their horses, their illnesses, and the scarcity of food for them, and pleaded with administrators for compensation. The busy post office at les Tavernes, in the Dordogne, went out of commission in pluviôse an IV because all four regular horses were exhausted. Although two of the horses had only been working on the *relais* for a few months, the *agent municipal* of the nearby commune of Cornille reported that they were already "hors de

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<sup>112</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 11L25 (Relais de poste des Tavernes) and 4L116 (Postes, district d'Excideuil), A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 1L375 (Postes et messageries). See also Rolland, "Postes et messageries".

<sup>113</sup> According to Pouey, "La poste aux lettres", decrees exempting postal office personnel from military service were issued from 1793.

<sup>114</sup> Arbellot and Lepetit, *Routes et communications*, p. 38.



service”:

Indépendamment de la perte de ces deux chevaux, le commissaire Pierre Versaveau vient d'en perdre deux autres il y a peu de jours; il n'est pas douteux que le titulaire de ce relais est entièrement ruiné tant par la rareté de chevaux, [que] par son manque de moyens pour s'en procurer...<sup>115</sup>

Indeed, so difficult and costly was the replacement of horses, that at one point in Year V, the *Comité des postes, transports et messageries* recommended to the department of the Haute-Garonne that any available resources should be spent to hire additional *piétons*, rather than to acquire overpriced, tired animals.<sup>116</sup>

Thus, the revolutionary decade was a disruptive, turbulent era which did more to destabilise communications than to improve them. Political, economic and social disturbances caused frequent interruptions and delays, and postal employees struggled constantly to minimise the number of lost, damaged, and opened packages. Even the renaming of towns and villages which accompanied the period of dechristianization caused difficulties: the “Manuel des postes aux lettres” from the Year III recommended that *expéditeurs* indicate both the old and new name of the destination, and one minister reported delays in correspondence “parce qu’il n’existe aucun dictionnaire indicatif des lieux de poste auxquelles les lettres doivent être adressées.”<sup>117</sup> As we have seen, many of the projects undertaken to improve the communications routes themselves also had a destabilizing effect. Government initiatives were shortsighted and fragmented, and the decentralization of control over local roadworks led to much disorganization, disagreement, and inaction. With the postal system, initiatives were focused upon improving the speed at which mail arrived in major centres while neglecting the transport of decrees from district *chef-lieu* to village; similarly, the focus of roadway reforms was not on the *chemins vicinaux* used by rural communities. The majority of government funding went to improve major paved roads rather than to improve or build smaller roads, or even to upgrade secondary roads. This system put the south-west at a disadvantage, for in comparison with the north and east, in the *Midi* a smaller proportion of roads were categorised as the *grandes routes* which were eligible for state funding.<sup>118</sup> Considering the emphasis placed upon the communication of political information to the people in

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<sup>115</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 11L25, Rapport de l’agent municipal de Cornille, sur l’invitation du commissaire Pierre Versaveau, titulaire du relais des Tavernes, 23 pluviôse an IV.

<sup>116</sup> A.D. Haute-Garonne, 1L778, Lettre du Comité des postes, transports et messageries, 16 frimaire an III.

<sup>117</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 1L501, Lettre de Cochon, ministre de la Police générale, 16 germinal an IV.

<sup>118</sup> The author of the section, “Communications” in the *Annuaire* for the Year XI, Dordogne, berated previous authorities for their neglect of *communications vicinales*. *Annuaire du département de la Dordogne, pour l’année sextile XI*, pp. 257-9.



revolutionary rhetoric, it is ironic that the improvements made to the postal system and to the road network took place far from the villages. True, the penetration of the postal system into the provinces was deepened, but it still fell short of the basic units of municipal government; as a local historian of the Hautes-Pyrénées remarked, in spite of revolutionary reforms, 80% of the country remained “*postalement isolé*” at the end of the decade.<sup>119</sup> The use of *piétons* to collect and deliver mail from the nearest post office proved a workable solution, essentially bypassing the problem of poor road conditions and insufficient postal services, but the question would not be truly resolved until the institution of the *poste rurale* in 1830.

### ***Bilan: speed and efficiency achieved?***

In balancing the efforts of the French revolutionary governments to reform and improve the communications networks with the obstacles mitigating their success, we have reached something of an impasse. Therefore, let us return to the questions posed at the beginning of the chapter: how effectively did the revolutionaries achieve their goal of communicating political information to the rural population? The issues we have been considering – reform of administrative institutions, road improvements and the expansion of the postal service – posed problems not because information was *not* travelling to the countryside, but indeed because so *much* information was travelling to the countryside. But to what extent did the system succeed in delivering official texts to every commune efficiently and quickly? In his report of 9 January 1793, Roland focussed directly on this question. When new laws crossed his desk, he said, he sent them out as quickly as possible, but

...avant que ces lois ne parviennent aux municipalités, elles ont un circuit assez long à parcourir, et souvent il arrive que leur réimpression et le passage qu’elles ont à faire des départements aux districts et des districts aux municipalités, emportent un délai d’un mois...<sup>120</sup>

From Roland’s perspective, the main concern raised by such delays was the question of law enforcement:

...de quelle époque les lois sont-elles obligatoires? est-ce de la date du sceau national, de celle de leur publication par les administrations des départements et des districts, ou seulement du moment qu’elles sont publiées dans les municipalités? La multiplicité de questions qui me sont adressées sur cet objet, rend leur résolution

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<sup>119</sup> Pouey, “La poste aux lettres”.

<sup>120</sup> A.P. vol.56, 9 janvier 1793, p. 694.



très instante.<sup>121</sup>

Another part of the problem, according to Roland, was how the texts were phrased. Laws which were too general were difficult to apply in all circumstances, and the additions and changes caused further delays. Paradoxically, he continued, local administrators were taking time to re-interpret the laws in explanatory covering letters, when in fact, the legislators had already worked to make the text as clear and simple as possible.

Clearly, the slow speed at which laws arrived in the provinces was only partly due to the obstacles posed by the communications infrastructure: the way in which the texts were handled along the line also came into play. In the case of particularly important decrees, legislators were increasingly forced to annotate their texts with imperatives, ordering local authorities to make the law their top priority. At the time of the “enlèvement du roi” in June 1791, for example, the department of the Lot-et-Garonne received the news via two decrees from the minister of the Interior by “courrier extraordinaire”; in turn, the departmental administration ordered each district to send the decrees “sur l’heure et par la voie des exprès” to all the municipalities in its area.<sup>122</sup> Similarly, in the Hautes-Pyrénées, the *Conseil général* of the department called an extraordinary meeting on 26 March 1793 to discuss the decree of 19 March which had arrived, again “par courrier extraordinaire”, regarding the punishment of those who would interfere with the recruitment process. “Considérant combien il est important de donner à ce décret la publicité la plus prompte,” the *Conseil* declared, 1,000 copies of the decree (for only 545 communes) would be reprinted and sent, “par courrier extraordinaire, aux districts et par ceux-ci aux municipalités”. Once the decrees had arrived in the communes, most of the rush was over: the texts were to be posted and promulgated in the customary way, although the fact that the *procureurs* were to report upon the local state of *tranquillité publique* every three days hinted at the importance of the decree.<sup>123</sup>

Attempts by historians to determine how fast information travelled from the capital to the provinces confirm and complement several of the observations made in this chapter. For mail sent by regular channels, Michel Vovelle, in his thoughtful synthesis *Découverte de la politique*, calculated that during the federalist crisis of 1793, official correspondence reached cities close to Paris within two days, but took more than ten days

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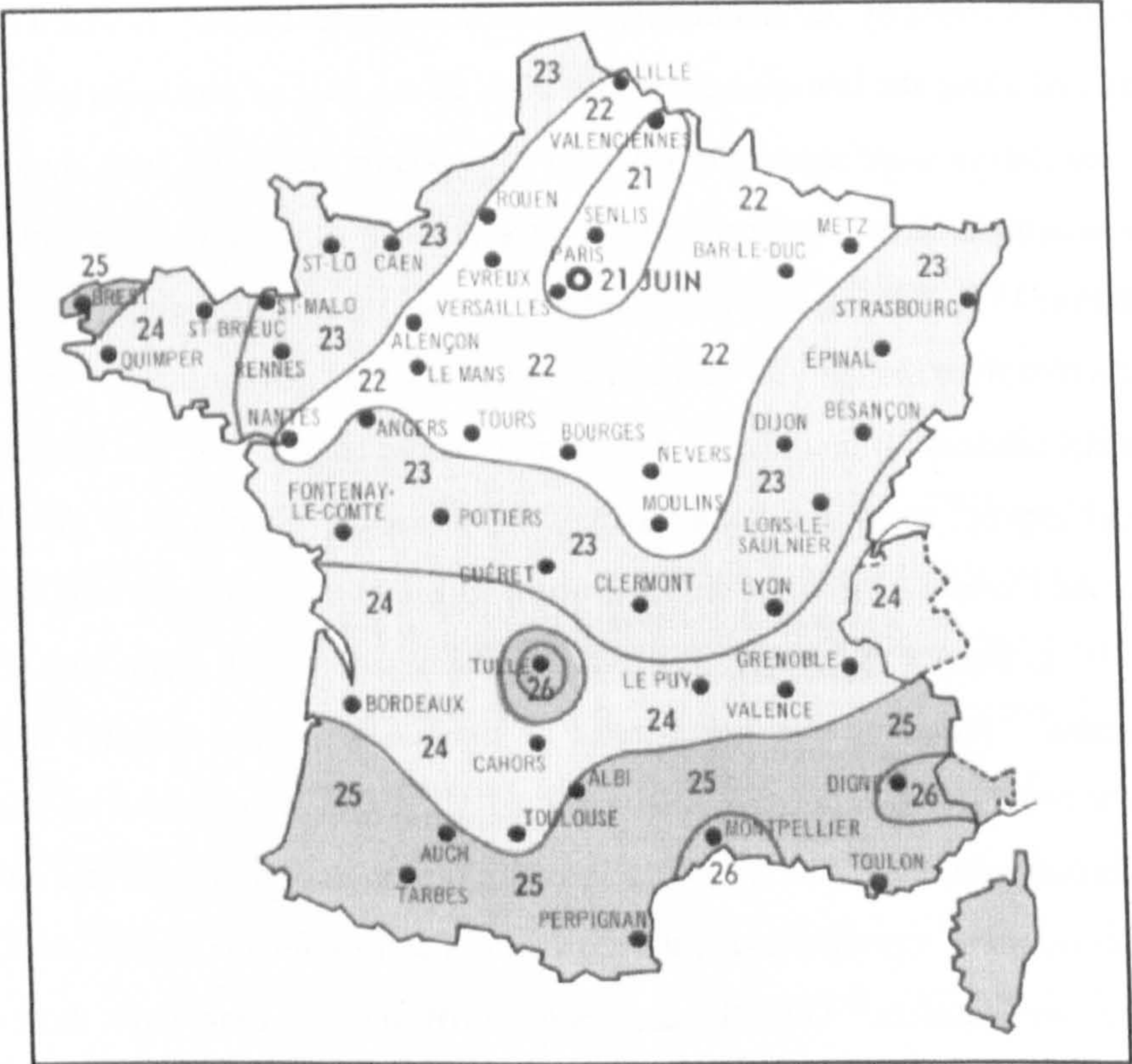
<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 694. Under the Directory, it was decided that the laws would become enforceable from the date of their arrival in the *chef-lieux* of the departments; see Figure 2-7, page 113, below.

<sup>122</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, L755, Délibérations de l’administration du district de Tonneins, 25 juin 1791, fol. 186r.

<sup>123</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, L125, Délibérations du conseil du département, 26 mars 1793.



Figure 2-6  
Diffusion of the News of the Flight of the King, 1791



Source: Reproduced from Guy Arbellot and Bernard Lepetit, *Routes et communications*, vol. 1 of the series *Atlas de la Révolution française* (Paris: Éditions de l'É.H.É.S.S., 1987), p.71.



to arrive in Toulouse, the Lot-et-Garonne, the departments of the Pyrenees, Franche-Comté and the entire south-east. “On mesure ainsi sur le terrain,” comments Vovelle, “la difficulté de transmission des nouvelles dans ce qui apparaît bien comme la France profonde.”<sup>124</sup> Vovelle’s findings of two to eleven days for a “temps d’acheminement normal” are confirmed in even greater detail for 1795 by Guy Arbellot and Bernard Lepetit (Figure 2-6, previous page). The work of Arbellot and Lepetit also provides a contrast between the time taken to convey regular mail and the speed of delivery of a *courrier extraordinaire*, using the example of the decrees mentioned above, sent by *exprès* to inform the nation of the king’s “enlèvement”. According to Arbellot and Lepetit, the decrees took only five days to reach the furthest points of the Republic, although the news took a sixth day to arrive in the mountains of the Corrèze, the Hautes-Alpes, or the area surrounding Montpellier.<sup>125</sup> Both sets of figures, for regular and express mail, match data gathered from the administrative archives in the departments studied.

The records kept by authorities under the Directory of the date of arrival of the *Bulletin des Lois* provide us with a third source for the arrival time of official texts. As mentioned earlier, the *Bulletin* was mailed out to every local administration and civil servant by the government, beginning in 1794; however, the laws were only considered effective in a given department from the date of their arrival at the *chef-lieu*. Figure 2-7 (page 113, below) shows a sampling of data taken from the Directory’s records for the Year IV, demonstrating how the length of arrival time varied with the seasons. The information presented here confirms the findings of Vovelle, Arbellot, and Lepetit for moderate periods, such as summer and autumn: in brumaire, for example, the *Bulletin* took between one and nine days to arrive throughout the Republic, and in thermidor, the same journeys took between four and twelve days. In the winter, however, the figures were considerably higher: the easiest journeys, to the Calvados and the Yonne, took six and nine

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<sup>124</sup> Vovelle’s calculations are based upon a survey of correspondence contained in the *Archives parlementaires. Découverte de la politique*, pp. 108-10 and map 20.4, p. 106.

<sup>125</sup> Arbellot and Lepetit, *Routes et communications*, p. 71; see also Marcel Reinhard, *La chute de la royauté* (Paris, 1969), esp. document I: la diffusion des nouvelles concernant la fuite et l’arrestation du roi, cartes no.1 et no.2, pp. 431-3. The story has most recently been retold by Timothy Tackett, in a new work entitled *When the King Took Flight*, to be published in March 2003 by Harvard University Press. In addition to confirming the figure of four to five days for Bordeaux and Toulouse, and six to seven days for more isolated mountain regions, Tackett describes the successive waves of news and rumour, first of the king’s departure, then of his capture and the false news of invading Austrian armies (chapter 6). Tackett’s fast-paced narrative skilfully interweaves the initiatives of the revolutionary government with the realities of communication in rural areas: “once the news had breached the walls of the capital”, he writes, “it rapidly echoed and resonated through local communications networks in much the same manner as the Great Fear two years earlier, with a variety of individuals on horseback, in carriages, and on foot fanning out across the nation” (p.185).



days respectively, whereas the *Bulletin* took more than two weeks to reach Marseille and nearly a month to arrive in the Finistère. The slight elevation of the *floréal* figure for the Finistère is quite possibly due to rainy conditions typical of that region in the spring; in general, the slight variations from the average only stress the unpredictable nature of travel in the eighteenth century.

The case study depicted in Figure 2-7 and the examples taken from secondary sources are useful in their depictions of the realities of mail delivery in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, their value for historians of communication in rural areas is limited, for in citing the length of time needed for materials to reach departmental capitals, they give an impression of speed which vastly underestimates the time required to reach rural communities.<sup>126</sup> As we have seen, once reaching the *chef-lieu* of the department, official texts were reprinted and sent to the districts, who then grouped and forwarded them according to the number of communes within the area served by each *bureau de poste*. From the time of delivery at the post office, they then depended upon the speed, diligence, and patriotism of the municipalities and their *piétons* in order to be communicated to the rural population in a timely manner: as Roland indicated in 1793, all of these operations could delay the dissemination of a law for up to a month in isolated regions. This figure is confirmed by Vovelle's more precise study of delivery time in his work on the dechristianisation movement in Provence. The decrees and laws ordering religious symbols removed and bells taken down – important, certainly, but not requiring an *exprès* – took up to two weeks to move up the Rhône valley, and up to three weeks for areas “qui ne sont pas desservies par la grande route de poste”. In the mountainous areas, beginning with the Haute-Loire, official news could take a month or longer to arrive.<sup>127</sup>

The only method of determining with certainty the period of time between the dispatch of an official text from Paris and its promulgation in the village is the study of the minutes of village municipal councils.<sup>128</sup> In those villages where the secretary

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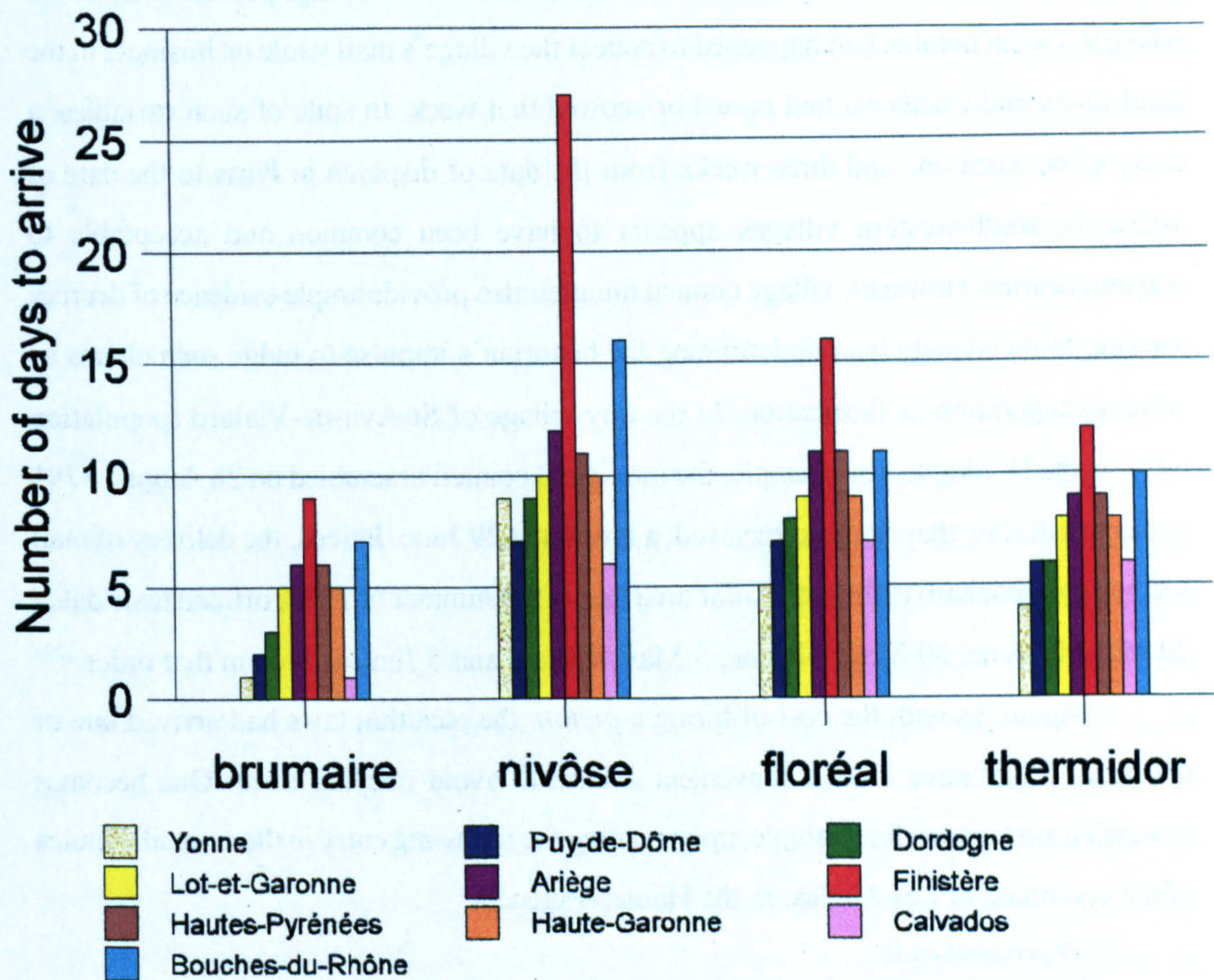
<sup>126</sup> Michel Vovelle takes care to note that “le temps du tri et d’une présentation qui n’est pas toujours immédiate” (*Découverte de la politique*, p. 109), and Guy Arbellot remarks emphatically, after citing a delay of five days before news arrived in the provinces: “et l’on ne parle pas ici des bourgs plus isolés!” (*Routes et communications*, p. 71).

<sup>127</sup> Michel Vovelle, *Religion et révolution: la déchristianisation de l’an II* (Paris, 1976), pp. 289-92.

<sup>128</sup> The deliberations of municipal councils are patchy in both their survival to this day, and their quality: the information gleaned from them is therefore impressionistic and unsuitable for a representative survey. Many of the smaller communities would not have kept a written record, in spite of the fact that it was made mandatory by law during the Revolution. Of those which were kept, an undeterminable number have disappeared either into oblivion or into the attic of the descendants of the municipal officers. A considerable proportion remain in communal archives, making the examination of the source for a given region problematic. In spite of these difficulties, they are rewarding sources, for they offer a vivid, unparalleled account of how the years of the Revolution passed in the village.



Figure 2-7  
Arrival Time of the *Bulletin des Lois*, brumaire-thermidor an IV



**Explanatory note**

Each grouping of bars represents a season: autumn (brumaire, Bulletin #1), winter (nivôse, Bulletin #19), spring (floréal, Bulletin #40) and summer (thermidor, Bulletin #58). The ten coloured bars stand for ten different departments, as indicated under the names of the months. In addition to the five departments of this study, five other departments have been included for comparative purposes: the Yonne and Calvados (both relatively close to Paris and on flat terrain), the Puy-de-Dôme (a mountainous region but closer to Paris than the Pyrenees), the Finistère (in the north, but far from Paris and with notoriously bad road conditions), and the Bouches-du-Rhône (the department of the large city of Marseille, yet far from Paris). Finally, as sending dates for the *Bulletin* were not available, the length of time of delivery was calculated using the date on which the laws were considered binding in the department of the Seine as a control. Thus, if the date given for the Seine was 10 brumaire, and that for the Hautes-Pyrénées, 24 brumaire, the *Bulletin* is shown as taking 14 days to reach Tarbes.

**Source:** Archives nationales, AF III 40, Tableau indicatif de l'époque à laquelle les lois et les actes du gouvernement, insérés dans tel numéro du *Bulletin des Lois*, sont devenus obligatoires dans chaque département de la République.



transcribed official texts, or noted their arrival, we can establish a clear idea of how long material took to arrive in a given locality. Naturally, the time required depended upon a host of different and sometimes unpredictable factors, such as the distance between the village and the *chef-lieu* of the department, whether or not the village possessed a *piéton*, whether a local notable had happened to collect the village's mail while on business in the local town, and whether it had rained or snowed that week. In spite of such variables, a delay of between one and three weeks from the date of dispatch in Paris to the date of arrival in south-western villages appears to have been common and acceptable to contemporaries. However, village council minutes also provide ample evidence of decrees arriving tremendously late, undermining the historian's impulse to judge such claims as either exaggeration or fabrication. In the tiny village of St-Avit-de-Vialard (population 372), in the Dordogne, for example, the municipal council assembled on 28 August 1791 to discuss the law they had just received: a law dated 29 June. Indeed, the delivery of mail seemed so haphazard in this particular area that in the summer of 1792, official texts dated 20 May, 13 June, 30 May, 14 June, 5 May, 4 May, and 5 June arrived in that order.<sup>129</sup>

Again, as with the cost of hiring a *piéton*, the plea that laws had arrived late or not at all might have been a convenient excuse to avoid obeying them. One becomes somewhat suspicious, for example, upon reading the following entry in the council minutes of the commune of Les Angles, in the Hautes-Pyrénées:

29 germinal an II.

Comme n'ayant pas obéi à la réquisition faite en date du 27 du présent mois, les commissaires [de la société populaire de Lourdes] nous ont demandé quels étaient les motifs qui nous avaient empêché d'obéir à la dite réquisition à nous faite par l'administration centrale... c'est d'avoir eu les nouvelles trop tard n'ayant pas eu le temps de voir sur qui on devait faire la réquisition...<sup>130</sup>

In other circumstances, however, the evidence of delays found by contemporaries and historians alike is compelling. In the mountain hamlet of Mayregne, for example, in the southernmost tip of the department of the Haute-Garonne, the laws transcribed by the secretary on 23 February 1791 had been decreed in Paris between 31 October and 22 December of the previous year. Such a delay – from two to four months – is understandable when one reads that Mayregne was cut off from the nearest town for much of the winter.<sup>131</sup> In other circumstances, the delay is more easily ascribable to the time needed to collect the mail from the nearest post office. When the municipal officers of St-

<sup>129</sup> A.D. Dordogne, Edep1220 St-Avit-de-Vialard, Délibérations du conseil municipal, 1790-1793.

<sup>130</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, Edépôt Les Angles, Délibérations du conseil municipal, 1791-1824.

<sup>131</sup> A.D. Haute-Garonne, 3E3767 1D1, Délibérations du conseil municipal de Mayregne, 1790-1837.



Pastour, in the Lot-et-Garonne, received an important notice from the department *chef-lieu* nearly one month after it had been sent out, they decided to investigate the activities of their *valet de ville*, who collected the mail: “pour éviter de pareils retards”, the *valet*’s obligations were to be made more binding by establishing a contact and by offering to pay him an additional salary.<sup>132</sup> Even the commune of Église-neuve-de-Vergt, which was virtually a suburb of its departmental capital, Périgueux, received texts 2-3 days after they had been forwarded by the department administration.<sup>133</sup>

### Linguistic obstacles and the translation of decrees

Thus, while the roads were often poor and the postal system, underdeveloped, laws, decrees and orders did, indeed, make it to their destination, albeit sometimes weeks after they had been sent out from Paris. As with the physical distribution of laws, the system used under the *ancien régime* to communicate information to a largely illiterate peasantry continued into the revolutionary decade. Royal officials, as we saw in chapter I, used both the parish priest and the rural municipal councils, the latter well-established in the south-west, for points of contact in village France. The advent of the Revolution did not fundamentally change these habits: the main difference was in the quantity of information disseminated. Laws were read aloud and explained to villagers, either “au prône” or at the close of mass, on the public square. Printed copies were posted on the church door and at the entrance of the *maison commune*, if there was one, as well as on the pillars of the covered market or gates in larger towns. However, the explanation of laws was an extremely important component of the process; as the secretary of the village of St. Martial d’Artenset, in the Dordogne, explained with regard to the decree of 17 March 1790, which concerned the sale of *biens nationaux*:

Ces décrets et lettres patentes devraient être suffisamment connus puisqu’ils ont été envoyés aux syndics dans les paroisses, mais leur connaissance n’a été que fort légèrement annoncées; les syndics, avant la formation de cette municipalité, se contentaient d’en faire l’annonce par une affiche attachée d’un seul clou mis en place à la porte de l’église sans en faire lecture, publication ni explication à ceux qui ne savent ni lire ni écrire, et précisément ceux qui peuvent se porter aux excès, pillages et vols défendus par les décrets et lettres patentes, parce que très souvent ils seront induits en erreur par ignorance plutôt que par envie de mal faire...<sup>134</sup>

With the rift between church and state created by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the

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<sup>132</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Edep St Pastour 1D1, Délibérations du conseil municipal, 1790-an IV; 9 décembre 1792.

<sup>133</sup> A.D. Dordogne, Edep579, Délibérations du conseil municipal, Église-neuve-de-Vergt, an II-an VIII.

<sup>134</sup> Georges Ladevie, *Mon village sous la Révolution: Saint-Martial d’Artenset en Dordogne: au travers des délibérations de son conseil municipal, 1789-1795* (Périgueux, 1989), p. 11, entry for 21 mars 1790.



responsibility for reading the laws increasingly fell to lay authorities, as has been previously noted. According to the law of 14 frimaire II, “les lois seront publiées dans tous les lieux, à son de trompe ou de tambour, dans les vingt-quatre heures de la réception, et lues au peuple réuni à chaque jour de décadi”; it was the responsibility of the *valet de ville* – the same character who often filled the role of postman – to proclaim the laws throughout the hamlets and outlying regions of the commune.<sup>135</sup> One colourful account from the Pyrenean village of Monléon even describes the municipal officers themselves, resplendent in their tricolour sashes, marching about the four principal squares of the town, “au son de piphre et tambour”, to proclaim the new laws.<sup>136</sup>

Thus, local authorities during the Revolution solved the problem of illiteracy by continuing the *ancien régime* practice of reading official material aloud, working through both traditional intermediaries, namely the parish priests and rural elite, and then newer ones, including local administrators and judicial personnel. In surmounting the literacy barrier, the government also went a long way towards solving the problem of language, for a mediator who could read aloud a written decree to an illiterate audience could also, very likely, translate it into *patois*.<sup>137</sup> Rural societies were in fact well acquainted with linguistic obstacles, and had become adept at coping with them. In the village of Négrondes, in the Dordogne, for example, the municipal clerk was asked to read the new laws “en langue vulgaire” to the citizens gathered on the central square, “et le tout expliquer et donner à entendre à tous les citoyens.”<sup>138</sup> If municipal records did not report such events more frequently, it is probably because they were unremarkable.

Clearly, rural municipal councils possessed the means to communicate a limited number of laws and decrees to villagers who could neither read nor understand French. However, with the ever-increasing volume of official material to be communicated, and

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<sup>135</sup> A distinction is made between the *lecture des lois*, which is done by the *secrétaire* or *greffier*, and their *publication*, more akin to the work of the *crieur public* of larger towns, which was undertaken by the *valet de ville*, often with the aid of a trumpet or drum.

<sup>136</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, Edép Monléon, 21 oct 1792. ‘Piphre’ is the gascon word for ‘fifre’, or fife.

<sup>137</sup> Although historians have stressed that municipal documents were composed in French from at least the early 1700s, the quality of that French leaves little doubt that in the five departments studied, it remained a second and not a first language for country-dwellers. Spellings such as ‘sitoyeint’ for ‘citoyen’ and ‘alvitre’ for ‘arbitre’ are not unusual, nor is the following attempt of the secretary of the village of Ponteyraud, in the Dordogne, to record the civic oath of their parish priest: “nous nous somme randut a la maisses pandan la selebration de laquelle le sieur Curés ces tornet vers le publes a jures a autes et interligible vois de veller avec soins sur les fidelles de la paroisse...”, (A.D. Dordogne Edép1078 (Ponteyraud), 6 fév. 1791). The degree to which rural citizens understood official French is a different matter, and much more difficult to ascertain. It is likely that while peasants would have been able to ‘get by’ in French, the subtleties of revolutionary legislative texts would have been lost on them.

<sup>138</sup> A.D. Dordogne, Edép 1005 (Négrondes), 12 mars 1793.



the potential indifference of the rural population towards a revolution in which they were increasingly relegated to the sidelines, both illiteracy and linguistic variation could form obstacles, real or invented, to the diffusion of political information in the provinces. Once again, revolutionary authorities demonstrated that effective communication with the inhabitants of the countryside figured among their priorities by undertaking reforms intended to overcome both of these obstacles.

Early government initiative in this area, involving the translation of laws and decrees into regional dialects, was benevolent and tolerant in comparison with later, more hostile measures. Deputies who supported the initial project argued that the citizens of France should be able to understand their rights and responsibilities, and that if they could not understand them in French, then it was crucial that they be expressed in a language they could understand. Dentzel, one of the key deputies working on the *commission de traduction* established by the Convention, was imbued with the civic virtue of the *commission's* activities:

...près de 3 millions d'habitants de cette grande République...sont malheureusement frustrés du bonheur de connaître au fond les lois de leur pays, parce qu'ils ne sont pas familiarisés avec la langue française, dans laquelle elles sont rendues.<sup>139</sup>

Dentzel went on to argue that the matter could not be left up to local interpreters, particularly in urban areas, who might be ill-intentioned and lead naïve peasants astray instead of enlightening them. It was absolutely necessary, Dentzel stated, [to] “faire parvenir, d'une manière compréhensible, jusqu'à la chaumière”, news of the important events and indispensable laws of the Republican era. As the deputy Rühl pointed out, in the region of the Haut- and Bas-Rhin, “les habitants des campagnes qui n'entendent pas le français, ne savent pas encore que la royauté est abolie en France”.<sup>140</sup>

As early as 14 January 1790, the National Assembly decreed that “le pouvoir exécutif sera chargé de faire traduire les décrets de l'Assemblée dans les différents idiomes, et de les faire parvenir, ainsi traduits, dans les différentes provinces du royaume,”<sup>141</sup> but it was some time before the proposed projects came into being. Although some departmental administrations, particularly in the east, took it upon themselves to arrange the necessary translations, these projects tended to be discontinuous and unreliable. Under the Legislative Assembly, therefore, the responsibility was conferred upon Dugas, an editor on the newspaper *Point du Jour*, who took on the project with

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<sup>139</sup> A.P. vol.54, p. 340, 4 décembre 1792.

<sup>140</sup> A.P. vol.53, p. 206, 6 novembre 1792.

<sup>141</sup> Cited in A.P. vol. 54, p. 340, 4 décembre 1792.



gusto. Interestingly enough, in contrast to later translation projects, it was the Occitan-speaking regions that held the deputy's attention, and by 10 November 1792, decrees had been translated for thirty departments of the *Midi*, including all of those making up this study.<sup>142</sup> Indeed, even contemporary opinion appears to have passed over the idea of translations into Occitan, a branch of dialects quite similar in some ways to French, in favour of prioritising distinct languages such as Breton, Basque, Italian, German and Catalan. Dugas' task was all but completed in December 1792 when Cambon, of the Committee of Finance, recommended that the Convention reject his petition for additional funds to continue translating laws into Gascon, on the grounds that the amount requested was exorbitant. In the discussion that followed, it was decided that laws would no longer be translated into idioms which were so close to French, and that instead, the *commission de traduction* should concentrate on "les moyens de parvenir à la traduction des lois pour les pays où les citoyens ne parlent pas communément la langue française."<sup>143</sup>

In spite of the apparently successful efforts of Dugas, at least until late 1792, government texts translated into Occitan do not make a notable appearance in the archives of the south-west. The propaganda-laden *Adresses aux habitants des campagnes* composed in dialect by urban political societies are somewhat more visible, although mostly in the archives of the clubs themselves.<sup>144</sup> On the one hand, it is possible that, like the oral translation of decrees by the secretary or parish priest, municipal councils simply neglected to note the language of the laws sent to them, possibly finding it both unexceptionable and appropriate that the government should seek to express itself in a way that they could understand. Even more likely, however, is the possibility that the system was simply not well implemented, and that the cost of the undertaking – the factor, indeed, which brought an end to the project – was such that few copies of the translated decrees reached village councils. Advocates of stronger, more aggressive measures even argued that proper translation into *patois* was impossible, for, as poetic and folkloric languages of the people, the dialects and idioms in question tended to be poor in vocabulary,

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<sup>142</sup> On Dugas' project, see Michel de Certeau, Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel, *Une politique de la langue: la Révolution française et les patois* (Paris, 1975), pp. 10, 287-8. A smattering of Dugas' papers and some examples of the translation work printed under his supervision are held at the A.N., series AA (Collections de lettres et pièces diverses) carton 32.

<sup>143</sup> A.P. vol.54, p. 708-9, 9 décembre 1792. Following this discussion, Dentzel presented a revised version of the project drafted by the *commission de traduction*, in which translations into only the five languages mentioned above were to be undertaken. See A.P. vol.55, p. 21-22, 12 décembre 1792.

<sup>144</sup> See my earlier article, Jill Maciak, "Learning to Love the Republic: Jacobin Propaganda and the Peasantry of the Haute-Garonne", *European Review of History*, 6 (1999), pp. 165-79.



particularly where politics and other abstract conceptions were concerned.<sup>145</sup> The question of translating laws and decrees continued to be raised into the more radical phase of the Revolution in 1793-94, although the issue became increasingly politicised and contentious.<sup>146</sup>

The shift from a tolerant policy of translation to a more aggressive policy of *francisation* can be traced to the start of the voyages of the *représentants-en-mission* in 1793, who saw *patois* as an obstacle to their programme of civic education.<sup>147</sup> However, even in the 1790 survey of the Abbé Grégoire, ostensibly carried out with a well-meaning scientific interest in documenting and studying the *patois* of France, there are ominous undertones of the Abbé's ultimate goal: the extermination of dialects in France. Grégoire's questionnaire, sent out to local officials, consisted of 43 questions concerning, for the most part, local languages and their use in society, and the level of instruction of the peasantry.<sup>148</sup> For example, Grégoire was curious about etymological links between *patois* and other languages, pronunciation and vocabulary, and the existent *patois* literature; he also wanted to know whether or not peasants were able to converse in French, and whether it was still common for the parish priest to give his sermon in the local language. Three questions enquired after the current political climate in the countryside: the effects of the Revolution (question 41), signs of patriotism in the countryside (question 42), and the situation of the clergy and nobility in the provinces (question 43). It was questions 29 and 30, however, which carried the threat: "Quelle serait l'importance religieuse et politique de détruire entièrement ce patois? Quels en seraient les moyens?" A perceptive respondent might well have sensed that he was being used as an instrument of nefarious political designs on the language and culture of his region.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, by 1794, Grégoire was calling

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<sup>145</sup> Barère makes this point most strongly in his report of 16 prairial an II; A.P. vol.91, p. 320; the report will be discussed further, below.

<sup>146</sup> On the later projects, see A.N. AF II 60, Papiers du Comité de Salut public, dossier 437 pièce 9, Brouillon d'arrêté concernant l'établissement d'un bureau de traduction pour les publications de la Convention à diffuser en allemand, italien, bas-breton et basque, 20 juin 1793; and, concerned uniquely with German translations, *Ibid.*, dossier 438 pièces 64-65, 89-90; dossier 439 pièces 10-11, floréal-thermidor an II. The task of making decrees intelligible to Occitan populations seems to have been left largely to local political clubs in later years.

<sup>147</sup> This periodisation is the one favoured by De Certeau *et al.*, *Une politique de la langue*, p. 10.

<sup>148</sup> Grégoire's 1790 questionnaire and a partial collection of the responses have been published by Gazier, *Lettres à Grégoire*; for the remaining responses, as well as much valuable research and analysis, see De Certeau, *et al.*, *Une politique de la langue*. Among the many excellent studies which analyse the questionnaire, see Martyn Lyons, "Politics and Patois: The Linguistic Policy of the French Revolution", *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 18 (1981), pp. 264-81, and David Bell, "Lingua populi, lingua dei: Language, Religion and the Origins of French Revolutionary Nationalism", *American Historical Review*, 100 (1995), pp. 1403-37.

<sup>149</sup> See De Certeau *et al.*, *Une politique de la langue*, p. 14.



for the unification of France and the destruction of regional languages as harmful to the health of the body politic, and his speech was “couvert d’applaudissements”.<sup>150</sup> The deputy Bertrand Barère, ironically from the Hautes-Pyrénées where the proportion of native French speakers was among the smallest in the nation, took the issue one step further when he suggested that foreign languages and regional dialects spoken upon French soil were the breeding grounds of counter-revolution.<sup>151</sup>

Nevertheless, with respect to the national assembly’s ultimate goal of communicating the political information brought by the Revolution, this more aggressive policy was not as different from the translation of texts as it might seem. What Grégoire and Barère were advocating was not to march into the *départements limitrophes* and fight counter-revolution as it had been fought in the Vendée. Rather, the battle for public opinion was to be won through words: legislative texts needed to be sent out and understood, and for this to occur, the peasants had to be able to understand French. “Vous avez décrété l’envoi des lois à toutes les communes de la République,” Barère [intoned], “mais ce bienfait est perdu pour celles des départements que j’ai déjà indiqués. Les lumières portées à grands frais aux extrémités de la France s’éteignent en y arrivant, puisque les lois n’y sont pas entendues.”<sup>152</sup>

As a result, the problem of local dialects was closely connected to the issue of education. Indeed, the legislative goal behind the speeches of both Grégoire and Barère was the establishment of compulsory primary education – notably, the teaching of French – in the outlying departments of the Republic. A number of projects and reports had been presented during the early years of the Revolution – both Talleyrand and Condorcet, for example, had proposed a complete reorganization of the educational system – but none were implemented until mid-1793. The first piece of relevant legislation to be passed was the law on primary education of 30 May 1793, according to which communes of between 400 and 1500 inhabitants were to have at least one primary school; under the Bouquier Law, passed on 29 frimaire an II, attendance in these schools was to be made compulsory, and there was to be a heavier emphasis on civic education.<sup>153</sup> Following the presentations, first of Barère and then of Grégoire, however, the departments in which languages other

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<sup>150</sup> A.P. vol.91, 16 prairial an II, p. 318ff.

<sup>151</sup> Barère, “Rapport du Comité de Salut Public sur les Idiomes”; A.P. vol.83, 8 pluviôse an II, pp. 713ff.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 715.

<sup>153</sup> Colin Jones, *The Longman Companion to the French Revolution* (London/New York, 1988), p. 272; Woloch, *The New Regime*, chapters 6 and 7; and Dominique Julia *et al.* (eds.), *L’Enseignement, 1760-1815*, vol.2 of the series, *Atlas de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1987).



than French were spoken received the particular attention of the deputies.<sup>154</sup> French-language instructors were to be chosen among non-clerical candidates by the *représentants-en-mission* from a list supplied by local Jacobin clubs, and appointed in every rural commune. Again, attendance was obligatory for all children, both girls and boys, although several months after Thermidor, the more moderate *conventionnels* would rescind the mandatory clause and include manual labour in the syllabus, although retaining French as the language of instruction.<sup>155</sup> Although the impetus to translate decrees never completely died out, the gradual eradication of potentially dangerous rural dialects through the exclusive teaching of French was a much more satisfying solution to the deputies. Reports of the local success of primary schools are mixed, overall, and the vast topic of the implementation of educative measures in the countryside still awaits its historian.<sup>156</sup> Nevertheless, the goals of the government, once again, were clear: communication of political measures at all costs.

As with the translation of decrees, however, the issue of *patois* as an obstacle to the diffusion of official information was not as pronounced in the south-west as it was in other parts of France. Whereas bas-Breton might have been the language of federalism and superstition, and Italian, the language of the counter-revolution,<sup>157</sup> Occitan would not be the target of such aggressive measures. Scholars of the *ancien régime* have established that administrative bilingualism was standard practice in the Occitan-speaking regions of the South, and the situation had not changed with the advent of the Revolution.<sup>158</sup> Indeed, so long as the peasants were able to understand the laws, Barère did not consider the fact that they spoke *patois* in other areas of their lives to be an obstacle. After having emphasized the necessity of forcing Breton-, Italian- and German-speakers to give up their

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<sup>154</sup> See especially the decree of 8 pluviôse an II which follows Barère's speech; A.P. vol. 83, pp. 717ff.

<sup>155</sup> Jones, *Longman Companion*, pp.271-4. The post-Thermidorian law on primary education dates from 27 brumaire an III; the Daunou law of 3-4 brumaire an IV reduced the number of primary schools to one per canton, rather than one per commune.

<sup>156</sup> Numerous local historians have unearthed material on primary education in the countryside. See, for example, Louis Combarieu, *L'Instruction primaire dans le département du Lot pendant la Révolution française, de 1789 à l'an VIII* (Cahors, 1882); and Roland Landry, "Aperçu sur l'instruction publique à Mussidan pendant la Révolution et le 1<sup>er</sup> Empire", *B.S.H.A.P.*, 96 (1969), pp. 118-29. Very little, however, has been undertaken in this direction by scholars of rural France.

<sup>157</sup> A.P. vol. 83, pp. 713-7; citation p. 715.

<sup>158</sup> On the *ancien régime*, see Cohen, "Courtly French", chapter 4; M. Grosclaude, "Langue populaire, langue littéraire et langue administrative en Béarn du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours", *Cahiers de l'Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour*, 15: 'Langues en Béarn', (1989), pp. 11-29. For the revolutionary period, see Georges Fournier, "Usages de l'Occitan dans la vie politique locale pendant la période révolutionnaire", in *Dictionnaire des Usages Socio-politiques (1770-1815)*, fasc. 5, 'Langue, occitan, usages' (Paris, 1991), pp. 11-38; and "La question linguistique au sud au moment de la Révolution française", *Lengas*, 17 (1985), pp. 157-77.



native tongues for French, he went on to argue that

...ce n'est pas qu'il n'existe d'autres idiomes plus ou moins grossiers dans d'autres départements; mais ils ne sont pas exclusifs, mais ils n'ont pas empêché de connaître la langue nationale. Si elle n'est pas également bien parlée partout, elle est du moins facilement entendue. [...] Le législateur doit voir d'en haut, et ne doit ainsi apercevoir que les nuances très prononcées, que les différences énormes; il ne doit des instituteurs de langue qu'au pays qui habitué exclusivement à un idiome, est pour ainsi dire isolé et séparé de la grande famille.<sup>159</sup>

After Thermidor, tolerance of local dialects and idioms returned, and Occitan has survived to this day as both the cultural heritage of the south-west and as an adamant challenge to central authority.<sup>160</sup>

### Conclusion: *la République au village?*

The Revolution clearly brought an "information explosion" in the far-flung provinces as well as in the capital. As we have seen, numerous problems threatened to jeopardise the effective communication of this information to the countryside, including a poorly managed road network and postal service, widespread illiteracy, and the prevalence of languages other than French in the countryside. However, the determination of the national assemblies to overcome these obstacles, together with the sheer volume of material which pelted the countryside, ensured that rural communities were virtually overwhelmed by the amount of written political material which they were expected to digest.

Moreover, officially addressed and delivered information was far from the only means by which the Revolution penetrated local village life. Alternative types of printed media, too numerous to consider in detail here, were in circulation and targeted rural audiences, routinely piercing the bubble of isolation in which French villages supposedly existed. The *Feuille Villageoise*, a newspaper which aimed to provide both political news and civic education to the peasantry through the intermediary of local literate subscribers, ran for the remarkably long period of five years, gaining the support and encouragement

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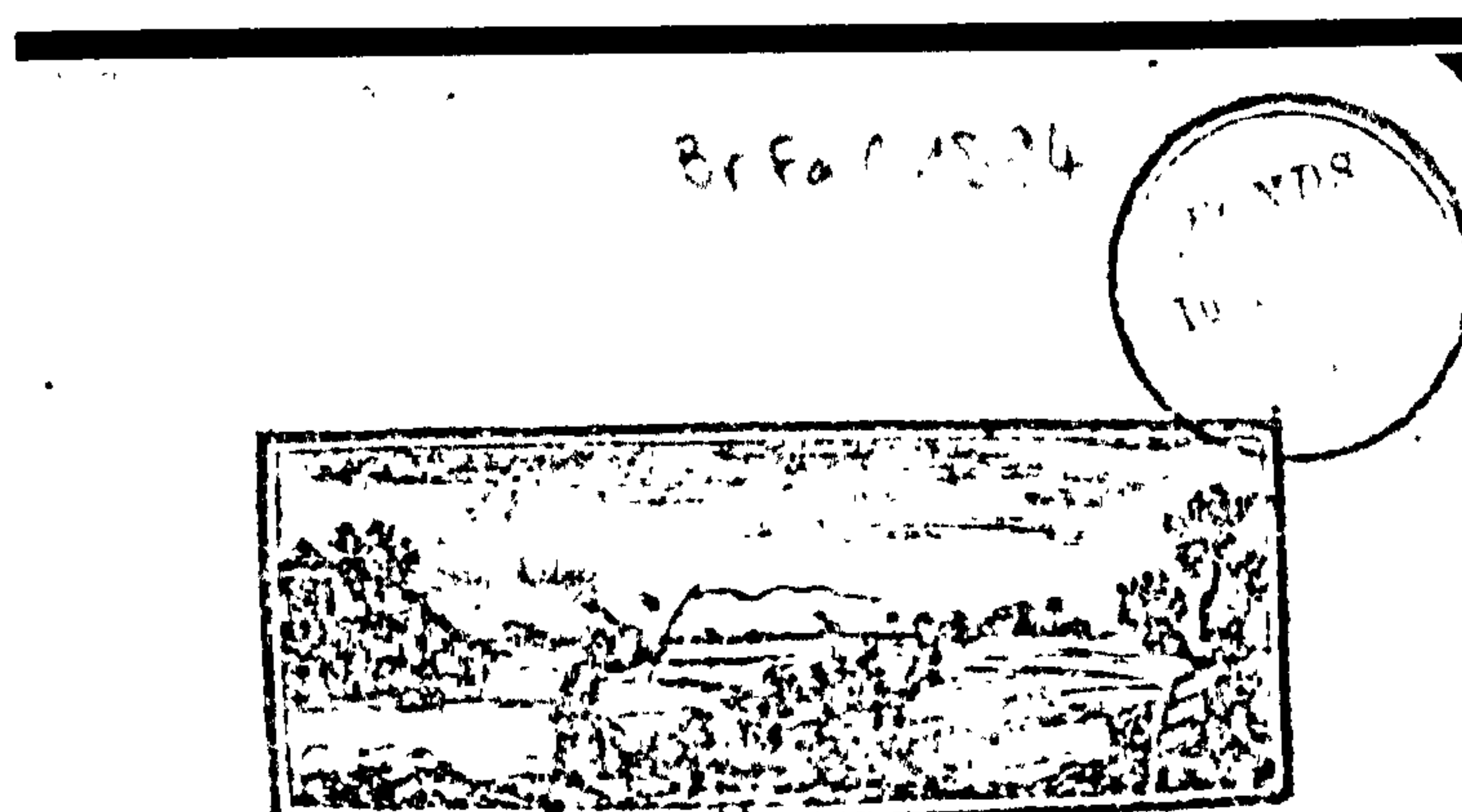
<sup>159</sup> A.P. vol.83, 8 pluviôse an II, p. 715.

<sup>160</sup> See Lyons, "Politics and Patois", p. 281; Cohen, "Courtly French". There is also a growing *occitaniste* literature; consider Laurent Abrate, *Occitani 1900-1968, des idées et des hommes : L'émergence et l'histoire de la revendication Occitane* (Puy-laurens, 2001), and Henri Jeanjean, *De l'utopie au pragmatisme? Le mouvement Occitan, 1976-1990* (Perpignan, 1992). Félix Castan, *Decentralisation. Manifeste Multi-Culturel et anti-régionaliste* (Montauban, 1984), is one of the major political pamphlets. For a somewhat less plaintive and biased approach, see Etienne Hammel and Philippe Gardy, *L'Occitan En Languedoc-Roussillon* (Perpignan, 1991), and Georg Kremnitz, "Remarques sur la situation sociolinguistique de l'Occitan en 1989", *Mélanges de langue et de littérature occitanes: En hommage à Pierre Bec* (Poitiers, 1991), pp. 258-72.



Figure 2-8

Adresse de la Société populaire épurée de Toulouse,  
aux habitants des campagnes, 15 messidor an II



A D R E S S E

DE la Société Populaire épurée de  
Toulouse, aux Habitans des Campagnes.

U T I L E S Méthayers, Libres Propriétaires, nos  
Amis & nos Frères. Quoi ! Penchez-vous encore à vous  
égarer. Au milieu des maillans & des laines que vous  
cueillez dans vos domaines, le serpent de la tyrannie  
se glisse & pique les vôtres, pour vous  
piequer de son dard envenimé. Le serpent de  
l'égalité qui vivent se m'empare de toutes les laines ;  
sous prétexte de vous être utiles, veut empêcher  
la fraternité de s'établir dans vos campagnes. Ne pou-  
vant pas vous faire impression la destruction du régime

A



of the Committee of Public Instruction.<sup>161</sup> Other, less-well known papers were also destined for rural audiences, including the *Feuille du Cultivateur*, which concentrated primarily on new agricultural information, and the short-lived *Journal des Campagnes*.<sup>162</sup> Almanacs circulating in the countryside also contained information of a political nature, including a listing of local authorities and important events,<sup>163</sup> and the printed images commonly sold by travelling pedlars and on the fairground embraced new themes, becoming a further source of political ideas and opinion.<sup>164</sup> Finally, an entire range of peasant-focused political propaganda was drafted and circulated, with variable degrees of success, by local revolutionaries in urban Jacobin clubs such as those in Toulouse and Marseille (see Figure 2-8, previous page).<sup>165</sup>

The degree to which these various forms of printed material penetrated into the countryside, reaching peasants in their villages and influencing their political opinions, is a matter for debate. As hoped for by contemporaries, it is entirely feasible that the literate

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<sup>161</sup> The professed goal of the editors of the *Feuille Villageoise* was to "provide a civic instruction for country-folk in order to solidify the new regime", (*La Feuille Villageoise*, Prospectus, I, no. 1, 30 September 1790; Bibliothèque nationale (Paris), 8°Lc<sup>2</sup> 463. The most complete historical study of the *Feuille Villageoise* is that of Melvin Edelstein: *La Feuille Villageoise*; for shorter synopses, see "La Feuille Villageoise, the Revolutionary Press, and the Question of Rural Political Modernisation", *French Historical Studies*, 7 (1971), pp. 175-203, and "La Feuille villageoise and Rural Political Participation", *S.V.E.C.*, 287 (1991), pp. 237-60. See also Didier, "La Feuille Villageoise".

<sup>162</sup> There has been very little research on the *Feuille du cultivateur*; see Octave Festy, "L'agriculture pendant la Révolution française. Les journaux d'agriculture et le progrès agricole (1789-An VIII)", *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, 28 (1950), pp. 35-53 and 148-168; and Dominique Margairaz, "La Révolution et l'intégration des paysans à une économie marchande", in *La Révolution française et le monde rural* (Paris, 1989), pp. 167-82, as well as the periodical itself: Jean-Baptiste Dubois de Jancigny, *et al.* (eds.), *La Feuille du Cultivateur* (biweekly), tome 1, no. 1 (October 1790) - tome 9, no. 10 (December 1800), available at B.N. S-4625 and S-4626-4634 (nearly complete collection). For other papers aimed at a rural public, see Wauters, "Presse départementale", and Georges Bourgin, *Le partage des biens communaux: Documents sur la préparation de la loi du 10 juin 1793* (Paris, 1908).

<sup>163</sup> Lise Andries, "Almanacs: Revolutionizing a Traditional Genre", in Darnton and Roche (eds.), *Revolution in Print*, pp. 203-22; Véronique Sarrazin, "Lumières et almanachs populaires: l'exemple du messager boiteux", in Lise Andries (ed.), *Colporter la Révolution* (Montreuil, 1989), pp. 35-49; and Claire Gaspard, "Les almanachs de l'an II: Quoi de neuf en dehors du calendrier?", *A.h.R.f.*, 58 (1986), pp. 141-59.

<sup>164</sup> Lynn Hunt, "Engraving the Republic: Prints and Propaganda in the French Revolution", *History Today*, 30 (1980), pp. 11-17; Rolf Reichardt, "Prints: Images of the Bastille", pp. 223-51 and James Leith, "Ephemera: Civic Education through Images", pp. 270-89, in Darnton and Roche (eds.), *Revolution in Print*; see also James Leith, *The Idea of Art as Propaganda in France, 1750-1799. A Study in the History of Ideas* (Toronto, 1965), and the many contributions to the conference proceedings edited by Michel Vovelle, *L'Image de la Révolution française: Communications présentées lors du Congrès mondial pour le bicentenaire de la Révolution, Sorbonne, Paris, 6-12 juillet 1989* (4 vols., Paris/New York, 1990).

<sup>165</sup> See A.D. Dordogne, 13L6 (Société populaire de Monpazier), fol. 67, 28 août 1791; A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, L1134 (Société populaire de Tournon-la-Montagne), 6 octobre 1793, 6 nivôse II; BM Périgueux LR IV 6 (Lapeyre, carton 49), Adresse de la Société des amis de la Constitution de la ville de Mussidan, aux municipalités et paroisses du district, à l'occasion du serment exigé des curés, vicaires et autres fonctionnaires, s.d. See also Jill Maciak, "Le rôle de la sociabilité révolutionnaire dans l'acculturation politique des campagnes de la Haute-Garonne, 1790-1795", Unpublished *mémoire de maîtrise*, Université de Toulouse-II, 1997, chapter 2; and Maciak, "Learning".



rural elite read material aloud to those normally excluded from this form of communication. "Newspapers have transformed the conversations of individuals", Gabriel Tarde submitted in 1898, "even those who do not read papers but who, talking to those who do, are forced to follow the groove of their borrowed thoughts."<sup>166</sup> There is some evidence, for example, of the transmission of information in rural areas by the medium of newspapers read aloud in public places.<sup>167</sup> In a *faubourg* of the town of Bergerac, in the Dordogne, a discussion arose among several *agriculteurs* who were listening to a certain citoyen Dupeyrerc as he read from a paper entitled *Journal des loix et des faits*, which he was apparently in the habit of doing "chez la Briande"; one witness also mentioned that news was read in the evenings "chez Cailloux".<sup>168</sup> Newspapers could generally be heard read aloud at lodging-houses in market towns, and references to having heard about news from a "feuille publique" or from an individual discussing "les affaires du temps" abound.<sup>169</sup> However, such instances are very difficult to quantify, and as regular as they might have been, their unofficial nature results in the fact that we know far less about how they might have influenced rural opinion.

Moreover, as much as printed material might have been read aloud, forms of communication which did not pass through a written medium would have been undeniably more easily consumed by an illiterate rural public. Indeed, over the last several decades, and particularly since the bicentennial, historians have argued that the presence of Republican symbolism and ceremony in the village was paramount in the communication of a politicised, pro-revolutionary message. The pageantry, colours and allegories associated with the *fêtes républicaines* would have been clear to all, even when haphazardly assembled by a small municipal council, and revolutionary lyrics to old tunes travelled far into the provinces.<sup>170</sup> The adoption of new forms of political sociability in the

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<sup>166</sup> Tarde, "Opinion and Conversation", p.304.

<sup>167</sup> The topic of newspapers as vectors of information in rural areas will be discussed further in chapter V.

<sup>168</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L51 dossier 376, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Daniel Brun, sans profession et Léonard Simonet, agriculteur, pour propos séditieux et attroupement; Interrogation of Simonet, 2 ventôse an VI, and testimony of Joseph Roulhille, cordonnier, 11 ventôse an VI.

<sup>169</sup> See, for example, A.D. Ariège, 13L25-8, Tribunal correctionnel de Tarascon, procès contre Jean Benet jeune, et d'autres, pour propos séditieux, floréal-prairial an IV, and A.D. Dordogne, 24L40, Tribunal révolutionnaire, procès contre Jean Dartenset, marchand, pour propos royalistes, floréal an II. The interaction between news heard from printed matter and by word-of-mouth will be discussed in greater detail in chapter V.

<sup>170</sup> On republican festivals, see Ozouf, *Fête révolutionnaire*, and Bianchi, *Révolution culturelle*. For a smattering of local histories, consider: Charles Lafon, "Célébration de la première fête de la Fédération à Bourdeille", *B.S.H.A.P.*, 64 (1937), pp. 208-11; Louis Bresson, "La Fête de la Raison à Tonneins-la-Montagne (20 frimaire an II)", *La Révolution française*, 1 (1881), pp. 330-7; Roger Lévy, "Les Fêtes symboliques pendant la Révolution en Normandie", *Annales révolutionnaires*, 4 (1911), pp. 235-38; and Louis Combarieu, *Les Fêtes républicaines dans le département du Lot pendant la période révolutionnaire*



Figure 2-9  
Membership List of the Garde nationale of St. Aignan d'Hautefort, Dordogne

*Citoyens de la Commune de St. Aignan d'Hautefort dans la Garde Nat.<sup>le</sup> en conformité de la loi du 4. 8.<sup>me</sup> 1791 & de la Lettre du District du 6. Juillet 1792. 2.<sup>e</sup> de la N.<sup>o</sup> avoir.*

N <sup>os</sup>	Date de l'Inscr. <sup>pt</sup>	Inscrits		Profession	Âge	Taille
		Noms	Demeures			
1.	4. août	Jean Sélier	Charaury	laboureur	26 ans	5 p. 2 p.
2	2 <sup>e</sup>	etienne Bastonaudins	Bergerat	1 <sup>e</sup>	30 ans	5 p 3 p
3	2 <sup>e</sup>	piere got met	Labrousse	1 <sup>e</sup>	55 ans	4 p 10 p
4	2 <sup>e</sup>	jean montagnias	Broumillion	1 <sup>e</sup>	68 ans	1 <sup>e</sup>
5	2 <sup>e</sup>	jean dubos bonnet	genibre	propriétaire	63 ans	5 pied
6	2 <sup>e</sup>	joseph gerain	hautefort	Administration des Bénéfices	36 ans	5 p 7 p
7	2 <sup>e</sup>	jean Beauvieux	1 <sup>e</sup>	mercenaire	47 ans	5 p 1 p
8	2 <sup>e</sup>	Bertrand Dumas	1 <sup>e</sup>	laboureur	58 ans	5 p 1 p
9	2 <sup>e</sup>	jean jauspe	1 <sup>e</sup>	1 <sup>e</sup>	52 ans	5 p 2 p
10	2 <sup>e</sup>	jean fuigerolas	Stille	1 <sup>e</sup>	42 ans	4 p 11 p
11	2 <sup>e</sup>	aubain montagnias	genibre	1 <sup>e</sup>	50 ans	4 p 10 p
12	2 <sup>e</sup>	leonard Luchaud	Broumillion	1 <sup>e</sup>	30 ans	5 p 3 p
13	2 <sup>e</sup>	marliar Labrousse	Laberre	labr	56 ans	5 p 2 p
14	2 <sup>e</sup>	guillonne Dumas	Charaury	1 <sup>e</sup>	40 ans	5 p 1 p
15	2 <sup>e</sup>	jean faure	Bedaloux	1 <sup>e</sup>	45 ans	5 p 1 p
16	2 <sup>e</sup>	jean Depay	Haumont	1 <sup>e</sup>	"	"
17	2 <sup>e</sup>	piere montagnias	Broumillion	1 <sup>e</sup>	68 ans	5 p 2 p
18	2 <sup>e</sup>	guilhonne montagnias	genibre	1 <sup>e</sup>	40 ans	4 p 8 p
19	2 <sup>e</sup>	antoine grangier	chabroulie	1 <sup>e</sup>	60 ans	5 p 2 p
20	2 <sup>e</sup>	piere Depaygne	Charaury	labr	36 ans	5 p 1 p
21	2 <sup>e</sup>	piere pyramoure	Bergerat	1 <sup>e</sup>	45 ans	1 <sup>e</sup>
22	2 <sup>e</sup>	piere Daussergue	maligne	1 <sup>e</sup>	40 ans	1 <sup>e</sup>
23	2 <sup>e</sup>	marliar pluzenet	Laberre	journalier	36 ans	4 p 10 p
24	2 <sup>e</sup>	aubain Sélier	genibre	lignier	30 ans	5 p 1 p
25	2 <sup>e</sup>	jean amoureaux	piatlot	labr	36 ans	5 p 1 p
26	2 <sup>e</sup>	jean Floire	genibre	labr	53 ans	5 p 1 p

Source: A.D. Dordogne, 4L118, Administration du district d'Excideuil, Garde nationale.



countryside also brought the Republic visibly into the *place publique*, doing more perhaps to change the political mindset of villagers than the laws and decrees read out after mass. Recent studies on the spread of Jacobin clubs and popular societies into the countryside, for example, have demonstrated that in some rural localities urban political sociability was indeed successfully implanted, with enthusiastic local intermediaries encouraging their less-well educated compatriots to being more civically active.<sup>171</sup> Perhaps even more effective at bringing revolutionary culture and imagery into the thousands of rural communes was the institution of the *garde nationale*. Although the National Guard has received a certain degree of attention from historians, its remarkable penetration into the countryside is still largely unexplored. A brief investigation into the archives of rural National Guards in the department of the Dordogne, for example, reveals the institution to have existed in virtually every rural community, and to have involved the quasi-majority of adult males: artisans and peasants, literate or not (see Figure 2-9, previous page).<sup>172</sup> Without a doubt, and regardless of obstacles such as poor road conditions and illiteracy, there was no lack of official political information arriving in rural communities during the French Revolution.

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(Cahors, 1898). Revolutionary songs will be dealt with in more detail in chapter III.

<sup>171</sup> Maciak, "Le rôle de la sociabilité révolutionnaire". For a shorter, more accessible summary and a complete bibliography of similar studies in other areas, see Jill Maciak Walshaw, "Sociabilité révolutionnaire et acculturation politique: un Jacobinisme rural dans la Haute-Garonne", *A.h.R.f.* (forthcoming 2003). In the five departments covered by this study, the proportion of communes supporting a political society between 1789 and Year III is well above the national average of 14%. See Boutier and Boutry, *Les sociétés politiques*.

<sup>172</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 1L511, Formation des bataillons de volontaires, engagements, ordres du département, 1790-an II; 2L102, 3L58 and 3L60, 4L117-121, 5L95-96, 6L60, 7L55, 8L87 and 8L90, 9L57, and 10L35, for lists of volunteers and minutes of activities gathered at the district level. See also Louis de Cardenal, *Recrutement de l'armée en Périgord pendant la période révolutionnaire, 1789-1790* (Périgueux, 1911), and Mi-Won Lee, "Les Bataillons de volontaires nationaux des départements de la Dordogne et du Lot", Unpublished *mémoire de maîtrise*, Université de Paris I-Sorbonne, 1987.



### III.

#### REACTIONS TO THE REVOLUTION: RURAL OPINIONS AND IDEAS ON CONTEMPORARY EVENTS

To a certain extent, peasant reaction to the onslaught of information brought by the Revolution can be gleaned from traditional administrative sources. The correspondence and deliberations of administrators at the local level reveal a wealth of information about how the Revolution functioned in the countryside, as the authorities were interested in whether the laws were followed or ignored. As the possibility of laws being ignored came to be of increasing concern, however, government representatives were sent out into the countryside, first as "civic missionaries" and later, more ominously, as "representatives on mission". Whatever they found, the deputies sent frequent reports back to their superiors, creating an invaluable repository of information on the political situation in different parts of the countryside.<sup>1</sup>

However, while administrative documents and the reports of government observers should certainly not be overlooked as sources on the Revolution in rural France, the use of documents which view the situation solely "from above" ultimately reveals a clearer picture of the relationship between the local elite and the peasantry than of the peasantry's views of that elite and the Revolution it represented. More useful are those sources which, while prepared for government purposes, are nevertheless composed by rural communities themselves. Historians have used the correspondence between rural localities and district or departmental administrations, for example, to elucidate peasant political opinion. The petitions sent to the national assemblies and to political societies, both local and in far-

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<sup>1</sup> The reports of government envoys are found at the *Archives nationales*, in the series F1<sup>a</sup> (550 and 551) for the *commissaires* of 1793, and in series AF II (82-146, arranged alphabetically by department) for the papers of the *représentants-en-mission*. However, the reports have largely been published, making them more accessible and easier to work with. See Pierre Caron, *Rapports des agents du ministre de l'Intérieur dans les départements, 1793 - an II* (2 vols., Paris, 1913), and Aulard, *Recueil*.



away Paris, have also been used to discover the rural mindset.<sup>2</sup> Even closer to the source of opinion, the deliberations of rural municipal councils often give information about village opinion on a piece of news or legislation. As we have seen, the scribe or municipal secretary was required to indicate the arrival of official news and texts of a political nature, and at times, this inscription was accompanied by remarks describing the reaction of the municipal council – or even of the inhabitants of the village, assembled to hear the news – to the material in question. Such comments are particularly likely to have been noted where legislative texts required a specific action or a response, such as the decree of 10 June 1793 which required that inhabitants vote on the issue of whether or not common lands should be divided. Even where an actual poll was not required, however, the actions taken by the municipal council and noted by its secretary help to indicate the general opinion of the news or legislation.

The use of local administrative documents such as these to study the relationship between governing and governed “from below” has occasionally revealed valuable information about how news about the Revolution was received in the village. However, as historians of rural society, we must be careful of becoming overly dependent upon sources which are so closely tied to the political process itself. Indeed, what local communities wanted more than anything else during the Revolution was to be left alone, and village officials were extremely careful to provide the authorities with the phrases they wanted to hear, and to avoid setting off warning bells with undue expressions of contrary opinion. Thus, while some of the letters sent to Paris might have expressed a sincere desire for a change in landholding structures, those which congratulated the National Convention on its victory over the *triumvirs* should be seen as a preventative measure, aimed at satisfying politicians who were likely to be suspicious of lukewarm political sentiment in rural areas. Moreover, the letters to newspaper editors and political bodies, while occasionally from “the peasants” of a given locality, were most often penned by a member of the literate rural elite. Even had their authorship been authentic, a handful of letters is hardly representative of the 40,000 communes in existence during the Revolution. Notes made regarding the deliberations of municipal councils, or the responses and reports sent

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<sup>2</sup> Georges Lefebvre, for example, published a considerable number of rural petitions on land issues in *Questions agraires au temps de la Terreur* (La Roche-sur-Yon, 1954). More recently, Bryant T. Ragan has used similar sources to show that peasants of the Somme possessed a “high level of political sophistication”: see Ragan, “Rural Political Culture”, and “Rural Political Activism and Fiscal Equality in the Revolutionary Somme”, in Bryant Ragan and Elizabeth A. Williams (eds.), *Recreating Authority in Revolutionary France* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1992), pp. 36-56.



to local administrations, might indeed come closer to painting a picture of rural response to the Revolution. These, too, however, must be read with caution, for as the decade wore on, villagers had increasing evidence that anything beyond rote, formulaic answers would earn them unwanted attention from the authorities. The outcome of these political circumstances was a collection of repetitive, lifeless accounts such as those of the *fêtes décadaires*, devoid of any originality and, for the most part, of any expression of political opinion.

It is for these reasons that the judicial sources which targeted those who expressed opinions contrary to the official revolutionary line are invaluable for the study of rural public opinion. Much more than the formulaic correspondence and administrative reports discussed above, the investigations and trials resulting from indictments for seditious speech provide accounts of rural thought on politics which, if carefully interpreted, reveal sincere and astute observations of a nation in turmoil. As described in chapters I and II, the Revolution was imposed upon a society in which oral communication networks already provided a means of gathering news: the eighteenth-century French countryside was home to a dynamic, active society in which a great deal of daily information was received verbally, in face-to-face encounters. Under the Revolution, the level of talk only intensified, and conversation was increasingly concerned with political issues. The remainder of this dissertation will focus upon the accounts of the political statements of peasants, and on what they reveal about rural popular opinion.

### **A Lost Voice:**

#### **Using Indictments for Seditious Speech to Eavesdrop on Country Conversations**

The sample of incidents of verbal crime in the countryside used for this study is drawn primarily from court records during the eleven-year period stretching from 1789 to 1799. The very existence of these documents is closely linked with the changing relationship between people and government which characterised the revolutionary period. While the political changes brought by the Revolution meant that rural citizens were invited, for the first time, to participate in the political sphere, administrators and legislators at the highest level began worrying that rural opinion might be swayed in an undesirable direction by the statements of local individuals, just as they had long known popular opinion in Paris to be.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Farge, *Subversive Words*; Darnton, "An Early Information Society" and "Poetry and the Police in Eighteenth-Century Paris", *S.V.E.C.*, 372 (1999), pp. 1-22; and Graham, *If the King Only Knew*. The topic of verbal sedition in eighteenth-century Paris, which was first noted in the Introduction (pp. 17-20), will



Although rural revolts and unrest were far from being a new phenomenon, they had usually been interpreted as the instinctive reactions of a populace when threatened or hungry. The passing of the reins of government into the hands, for the most part, of educated "commoners", as well as growing literacy rates and a general awareness of "public opinion" as a new factor in politics, led officials to think of the peasantry as a "public" like any other, which might be swayed or convinced to hold one opinion over another. The chatter of the inhabitants of the countryside was, indeed, significant: as Gabriel Tarde has stated, "from the political point of view, conversation is, before the press, the only brake on governments, the unassailable fortress of liberty."<sup>4</sup>

As this realisation gradually dawned upon the legislators of the Revolution, decrees prohibiting the utterance of all manner of seditious, anti-revolutionary or counter-revolutionary words began to appear, in an attempt to keep the masses from being led astray. The changing nature of this legislation, as well as the legal apparatus put in place to enforce it, will be dealt with at length in chapter IV, but first we must familiarise ourselves with the various characteristics of the trials themselves, as they constitute the core of the body of sources on the communication of political ideas, outside of official channels. While the amassing of such a large number of comparable documents invites statistical analysis, we must be wary of the urge to quantify documents which are essentially impressionistic in nature. Each case of political speech represents a snapshot of peasant thoughts and reactions: a brief glimpse into a world of popular political ideas which we have all but lost. The very ubiquity of daily chatter defies the attempt to quantify evidence of it, for even were we able to recover every last indication of rural political speech present in the archives, the output would nevertheless be an incomplete record: as with all historical documents, the archives of seditious speech represent not what was said, but rather, what the authorities saw fit to commit to paper. Moreover, the very nature of anti-governmental talk suggests that much of it took place behind closed doors.<sup>5</sup>

Other historians working with popular political opinion have noted similar problems regarding the quantification of their data. Philippe Daumas, in his study of the papers of the *juges de paix* in the Val-de-Marne, writes that local judicial sources

...ne sont pas destinées simplement à être quantifiées. Chaque document, si imparfait soit-il, représente avant tout une parcelle de vie.... Les personnages qui l'animent, parfois pittoresques, souvent attachants, protagonistes ou

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be discussed further in chapter IV.

<sup>4</sup> Tarde, "Opinion and Conversation", p.313.

<sup>5</sup> On the issue of the public or private nature of political conversations, see chapter IV, pp. 228-32.



simples témoins d'événements qui visiblement les dépassent, racontent la Révolution dans leur village à travers leurs conflits et les difficultés de leur vie quotidienne.<sup>6</sup>

Joel Samaha, in his work on local criminal court records in Elizabethan England, concurs, describing the difficulties inherent in using the "incomplete" and "sparse" record to reconstruct the lives of ordinary people in the early modern period,<sup>7</sup> and Buchanan Sharp warns that while the assize indictments for seditious speech represent "a good continuous record of popular political attitudes" in seventeenth-century England, any attempt to draw a direct link between the number of cases of sedition and the political atmosphere of a given period is necessarily foolhardy, due to the incompleteness of such source material.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the body of sources used here must not be taken by the reader to be an exhaustive catalogue of every statement, or even of every type of statement, uttered by rural inhabitants during the Revolution. However, a certain number of general conclusions might still be drawn from the distribution and character of the available data, and it is to this data which we now turn our attention.

The sample constitutes the quasi-majority of incidents of seditious speech leading to trials in the two regions studied, representing the departments of the Dordogne and Lot-et-Garonne on the one hand, and the departments of the Hautes-Pyrénées and Ariège together with the connecting territory, the southernmost district of the Haute-Garonne, on the other hand. The cases are drawn from the various departmental courts, whose records are retained at the level of departmental archives, as well as from the revolutionary tribunal in Paris, in those instances when a particular *dossier* was considered beyond the competence of the local judiciary.<sup>9</sup> Due to the incompleteness of the archives of provincial courts, it is often difficult to follow the documentation as far as the conclusion of the case. However, we may note that for the 121 cases for which we have a verdict, a majority of 83 (69%) were acquitted. Of the 33 cases in which the accused was convicted of the

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<sup>6</sup> Philippe Daumas, "Justice et Révolution en Val-de-Marne: Les tribunaux civils de Sucy-en-Brie et Ormesson de l'ancien régime au Directoire (1782-an VI)", Unpublished *mémoire de maîtrise*, Université de Paris-XII, 1990, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Joel Samaha, "Gleanings from Local Criminal-Court Records: Sedition Amongst the "Inarticulate" in Elizabethan Essex", *Journal of Social History*, 8 (1975), pp. 61-75; citation p. 61.

<sup>8</sup> Buchanan Sharp, "Popular Political Opinion in England, 1660-1685", *History of European Ideas*, 10 (1989), pp. 13-29; citation p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to these complete trials, the archives examined yielded a considerable number of references to verbal incidents against which no further action appears to have been taken. Such references occur throughout the documentary record: in police reports, municipal registers, departmental assessments and reports on the local *esprit public*, and correspondence with legislative bodies such as the *Comité des recherches* and the *Comité des rapports*. While such instances will be taken into account where relevant, they will not be associated with the main body of trials for analytical purposes.



offence, only 12 were executed;<sup>10</sup> the remaining 21 were dealt with in various ways, including prison sentences, deportation, and, in the case of a parish priest convicted of publicly refusing to read the *mandement de l'évêque*, simply being released from his duties.

In keeping with the goal of investigating political communication in rural areas, two main criteria were followed in the gathering of cases, producing a sample numbering 168 trials. The first of these concerns the importance of words, and particularly spoken words, in the realm of political justice: cases were included either because the main crime cited was a verbal one, or because, in cases of seditious activities, the words of an agitator or follower were considered criminal in themselves, as having incited the events which ensued.<sup>11</sup> The second criterion involves the degree of "rurality" of the individual case: events which occurred in very small localities and before a peasant audience – ideal circumstances for this study – were included, while large-scale events occurring in a department capital in which most actors were town dwellers were not. Indeed, the fact that the authorities believed it worthwhile to pursue comments made at the village watering-hole by poor labourers as seditious remarks potentially dangerous to the public order is exemplary of a major shift in attitude towards the place of the peasantry on the political stage. Overall, 88 trials, or just over half of the collected cases, concern incidents which occurred in small villages and localities with no administrative function, that is, "simple communes"; a further 38 incidents (23%) took place in slightly larger centres or market towns, and the final 42 cases (25%) took place in towns which were the seat of their district. As all 168 cases were selected on the basis of their "rurality", trials falling into one of the latter two categories were admitted only if the audience, represented by the witnesses, was largely peasant in origin. Thus, even in those cases where the location of the incident is a small town or administrative centre, the focus of the investigation on the discussion of politics among peasants remains a constant.

An analysis of the professions of the defendants – or the speakers of seditious words – while illustrative of this rural character of the cases studied, also reveals the social complexity of peasant communities. As shown in Figure 3-1, the sample of

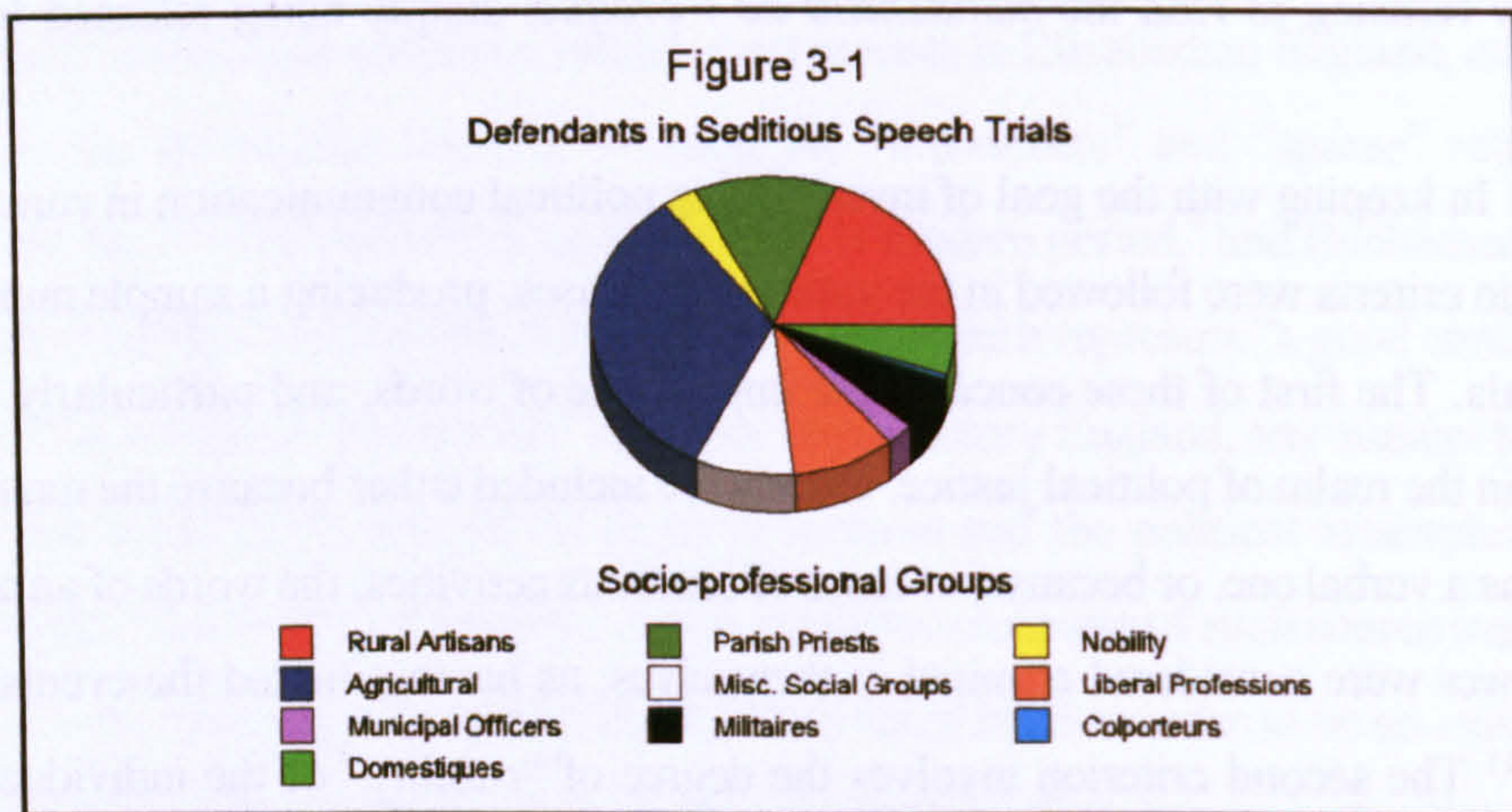
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<sup>10</sup> One, Laval, *dit* Répare, of the village of Cabans in the Dordogne, was condemned in 1790 to be "pendu et étranglé" for having made false announcements to the village in order to provoke the inhabitants to revolt against the *seigneurs* (A.D. Dordogne, B1701, Sénéchaussée de Sarlat). The remaining 11 were victims of the guillotine in 1793-94.

<sup>11</sup> Of the 168 cases of seditious speech which were taken to trial, only 45, or 27%, are explicitly linked to actions.



individuals who were indicted for voicing political opinions in a rural context is quite varied:



As one might expect, there is a considerable representation of the agricultural sector: 63 defendants describe their primary occupation as farming, and a considerable proportion of the remaining categories (parish priests, rural artisans, members of the municipal council, servants, and large groups whose individual identity is uncertain) were almost certainly part of what we would think of as village life. The remaining categories of the sample are distinguishable from the inhabitants of the village either by their socio-economic status (24 individuals from either the nobility or from professional groups) or by their role as “outsiders” (11 soldiers and one pedlar).<sup>12</sup>

Thus, whether the discussions in question took place outside the parish church after Mass, or in the nearest market town during a fair, the great majority of speakers – 82% of the 193 defendants listed above – would have been familiar figures to their peasant listeners. What is even more significant, however, is that the categories of individuals described in chapter I as literate intermediaries in rural society are represented here in abundance. Parish priests, for example, represent a significant slice of those called up on charges of seditious speech. The marked presence of these individuals, apart from their recognised role as literate intermediaries, clearly arises from the fact that the Revolution represented a threat to their status and livelihood, giving them more than average reason to complain about it in public. The presence of the local aristocracy, similarly, is perhaps surprising merely for the small number accused of seditious speech (six of the 193 defendants analysed). A third group, consisting of the local *coqs du village*, is more

<sup>12</sup> N.B.: as some cases have multiple defendants, the total of the numbers represented in Figure 3-1 is greater than 168.



intriguing, for it includes those listed as members of the *conseil municipal*, as well as the larger landowners: 26 out of the 63 engaged in agriculture were described as “propriétaires” or “cultivateurs” rather than their poorer cousins, the *laboureurs* and *manoeuvriers*.<sup>13</sup> While the members of this group, apart from the nobility, had more reason to praise the Revolution than to curse it, they would nevertheless have held clear opinions about political events and their repercussions in the village, and they would have been a reliable source of information throughout the period. Other social groups, finally, often acted as intermediaries without necessarily being literate: the group of *militaires*, for example, and the one *colporteur*, brought news and ideas from outside by nature of their transient professions, and a certain proportion of the artisans, including innkeepers and millers, would have had regular traffic from beyond the village in their shops and establishments.

Thus, over 40% of the speakers listed in Figure 3-1 could be considered intermediaries of some sort, a percentage which is considerably higher than their actual numbers in the population. Such over-representation is not surprising, when one considers that all of these individuals represented a source of information in rural society. Whether by virtue of their literacy, their role as local leaders, their transience, or the fact that their occupations brought them into contact with a greater number of people, such intermediaries were used to having rural citizens come to them for opinions, advice, and news. Moreover, the authorities who were on the lookout for speakers of seditious words would likely have concentrated their search among such groups. Rural intermediaries were, by definition, the most politicised members of the village community, and their known role as interpreters of outside information would have made them prime suspects in the minds of legislators and police authorities alike, with regard to the swaying of rural public opinion. Those for whom the course of the Revolution brought misfortune, such as the members of the nobility and clergy, were naturally expected to speak out against it, and the traditional news-mongers and carriers of information were busily employed redistributing the volumes of information produced by the political changes and events.

One final category of defendants deserves special consideration: those accused persons who were identified as women. Of the 168 trials in the sample, there are only 12

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<sup>13</sup> The historian of rural France must take care to identify the terms used locally to describe different types of “peasants”; the word *laboureur*, for example, identified by Georges Lefebvre as a large landowner in *Paysans du Nord*, in the south west signified a petty farmer, with barely enough land to survive. For further thoughts on the topic, see Harvey Smith, “Getting To Know Peasants: Local Population Records and Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century France”, *Social History*, 28 (1995), pp. 375-419.



cases in which the primary defendant is a female. Of the eight whose social status is indicated, two are servants, one is the wife of an *émigré* nobleman, one is a *cabaretière*, and four are agricultural labourers; a brief glance at the context of the trial of the remaining four suggests that they, too, were very likely from the agricultural sector. The cases in which women were the defendants come from both regions studied, but their distribution within the revolutionary decade is on the whole rather late: one case took place in 1793, with the rest occurring in 1794 or later. Eight of the twelve defendants were acquitted, and only one of the guilty died on the guillotine, a proportion (8.3%) which is roughly equal to that for all of the collected cases (7.1%).<sup>14</sup>

On the whole, the very low proportion of female defendants implies that authorities expected rural women to be even less likely to discuss politics than their menfolk. Whether this was actually the case is highly doubtful: even if we were to discount the traditional stereotype of female villagers as talkative and gossiping, women were very much involved in rural political life in south-west France, and although they may not have been able to discuss their opinions in the local cabaret, there were other parts of the village which, as we saw in chapter I, constituted an exclusively female arena for discussion. Indeed, the official assumption that women were less interested in politics may have given them a certain degree of safety in their daily talk. Just as the authorities seem to have awakened only slowly to the possibility that the peasantry could hold political opinions, so a similar stereotype of ignorance and lack of political awareness appears to have delayed the appearance of women as defendants in political trials. Even within the twelve cases cited, the charges on which women are found guilty appear to follow the traditional association of women with disputes over grain prices or religion, and with the tendency to gather in threatening numbers and refuse to disperse, whereas the comments of female witnesses in trials of male defendants (see chapter V) reveal that they held opinions on a wide range of political topics.<sup>15</sup>

If certain motivations and methods of political contestation were considered traditionally “feminine”, how did the authorities assess categories of “seditious” activity

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<sup>14</sup> Two of the remaining verdicts are unsure, and the twelfth - the case of the *émigré* nobleman's wife - is the only case of deportation in all 168 trials.

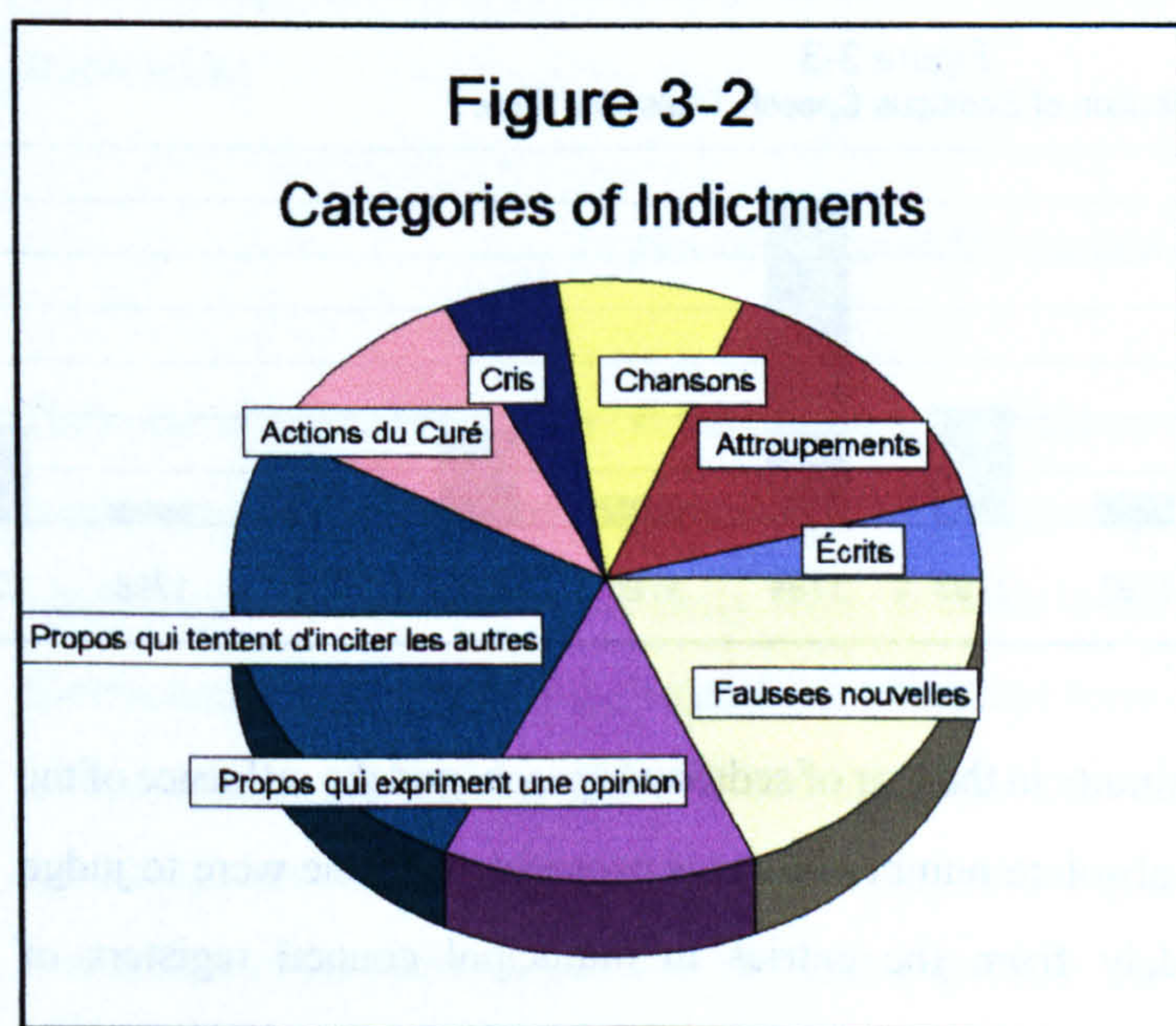
<sup>15</sup> Of the twelve cases which concern us here, four involve *attroupements* only, and a further two were brought against the utterance of words which were considered to have incited a seditious gathering. In police reports from the era generally, the presence of women is invariably noted where religion, requisitions or the price of grain is at issue. On this topic, see Cynthia Bouton, “Gendered Behaviour in Subsistence Riots: The Flour War of 1775”, *Journal of Social History*, 23 (1990), pp. 735-54, and Shirley Elson Roessler, *Out of the Shadows: Women and Politics in the French Revolution, 1789-95* (New York, 1996).



in general in rural France during the Revolution? The exact denomination of the categories of crime as they appear in the sources varies somewhat, depending on the region, the level of police or judicial authorities from which the document was generated, and the time period. Charges of “propos contre-révolutionnaires” and “propos séditieux”, for example, were used for a wide range of statements. At the same time, the description of charges as laid out in the documents is often specific to the situation, such as that against Tarri, who was accused of having uttered “propos royalistes et subversifs”, and that against Fargeot, from Montignac, whose indictment included the fact that he had used the alleged words in an attempt to thwart the sale of *biens nationaux*.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the phrasing of charges fluctuated over the revolutionary decade. The charge of verbal “lèse-nation”, for example, had fallen out of use by 1791, but the charge of “provocation au rétablissement de la royauté”, signifying a similar crime, was used only after 27 and 28 germinal IV, when laws proscribing the crime were promulgated.

For all of these reasons, the categories of seditious activity involving communication have been redrawn slightly, according to criteria specific to this study rather than to the wording of the indictments (Figure 3-2). Thus, while charges of

“seditious singing” and “seditious shouts” have remained more or less the same as on the documents, the tremendous variety of seditious “propos” have been categorised as either merely expressing an opinion, or actively attempting to discourage listeners or to change their behaviour. The

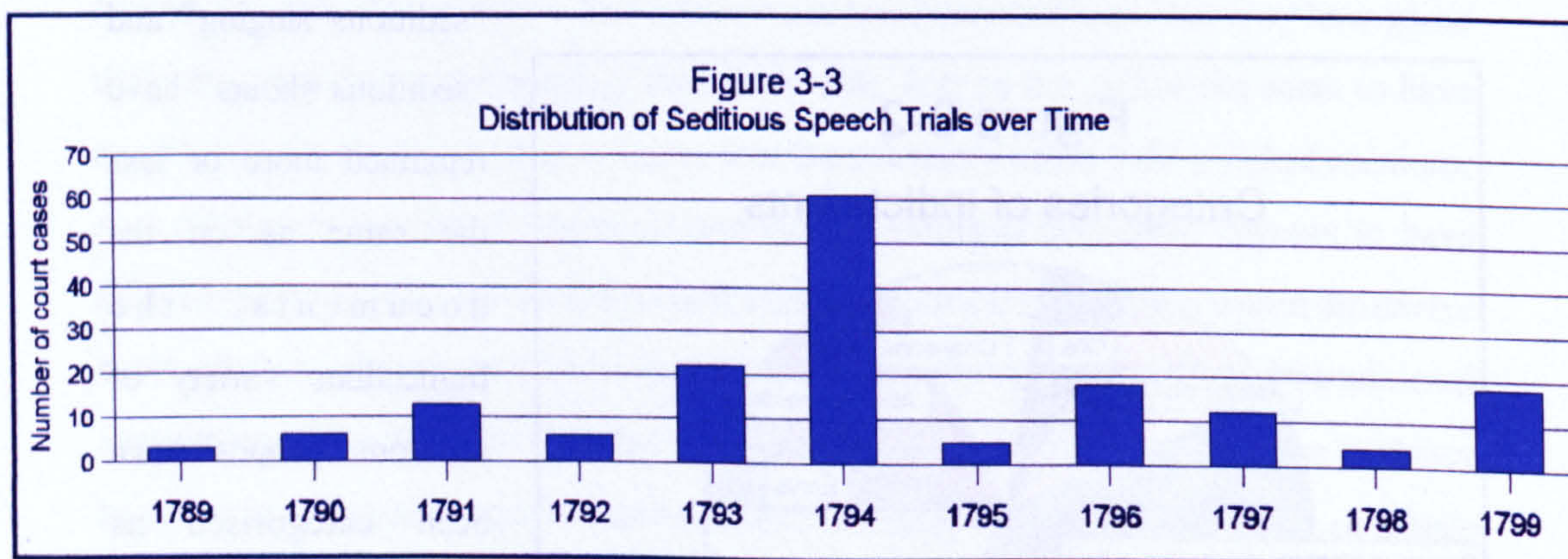


<sup>16</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-1 and 2L98-93, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Jean-Baptiste Tarri, ci-devant consul et cultivateur, pour paroles subversives, nivôse II; Tribunal révolutionnaire du département de la Dordogne, procès contre François Fargeot, huissier, pour propos tendant à empêcher la vente des biens nationaux, II; cited in *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne sous la Terreur. Documents authentiques classés et mis en ordre par les commis greffiers du Tribunal civil de Périgueux* (2 vols., Périgueux, 1880), vol. 2, pp. 45-56 [Hereafter, *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents).]



sedition actions of parish priests, because of their unique relationship to rural communities, have been classified apart, as has any seditious communication which is written rather than oral. The category of “fausses nouvelles”, finally, has been enlarged to include all false statements intended – according to the authorities – to alarm the peasants. As the reader will note, while the prospect of verbal crime connected with violent revolt remained fearsome, a considerable proportion of the authorities’ attention was directed towards crimes which merely expressed an opinion or, at worst, attempted to change the opinions of others.

Throughout this analysis, the question of change over time is a central one, due to the extreme political instability of the revolutionary era. The authorities’ definition of sedition, and of the individuals who could be arrested for it, was closely tied to a gradual realisation of the political capacities of the people, and the importance of eliminating potential counter-revolutionaries fluctuated with the fears of the government. Both of these observations will be dealt with more fully in chapter IV, but for now, a brief representation of the temporal distribution of source material will help to illustrate the point:



These figures show both continuity in the fear of seditious speech, and the influence of the political atmosphere on the absolute number of cases prosecuted. If one were to judge village political activity solely from the entries in municipal council registers of deliberations, rural citizens would seem to have been most enthusiastic about participating in civic affairs during in the first three years of the Revolution, with interest dropping off markedly in 1793-94; and yet the accusations from these two years represent more than half of the seditious remarks of the decade. Clearly, the high number of seditious remarks recorded for a period of apparent apathy can be linked to the fact that it was during the reign of Terror that the government was most determined to control public opinion. In fact,



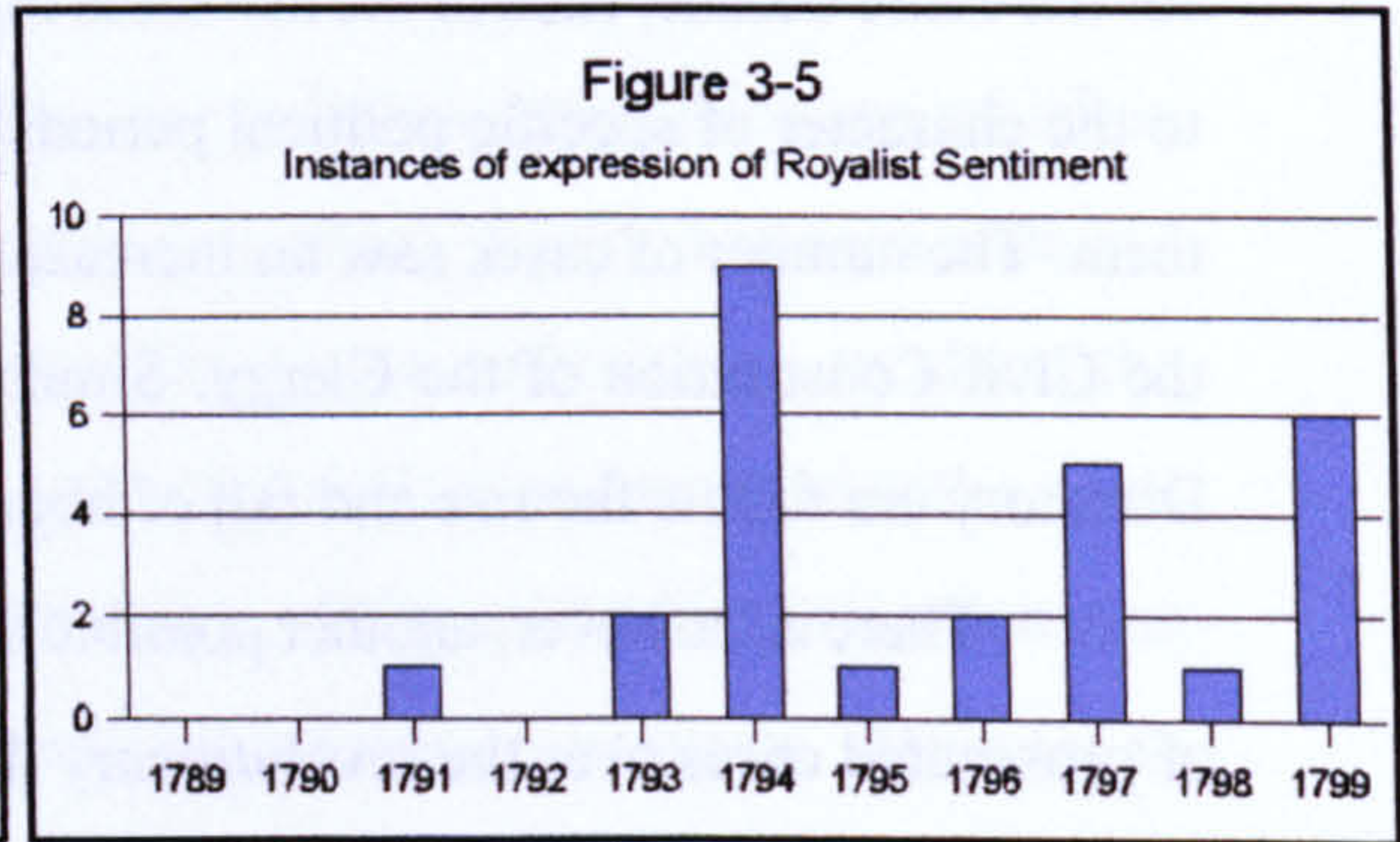
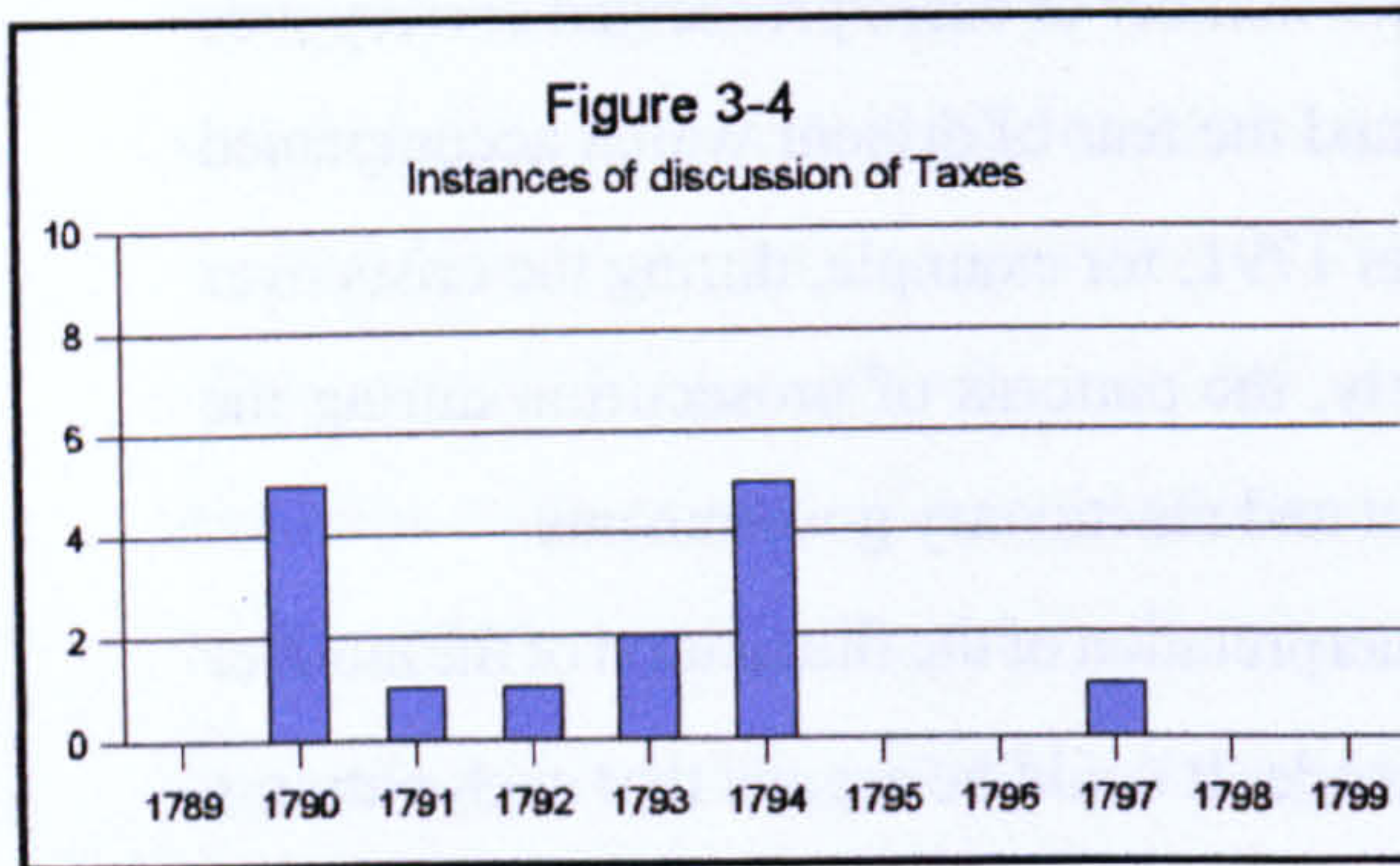
for the entire decade, each of the increases in the number of cases prosecuted corresponds to the character of specific political periods and the fear of dissent which accompanied them. The number of cases saw an increase in 1791, for example, during the crisis over the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Similarly, the patterns of prosecution during the Directory era follow the rise and fall of liberal and reactionary governments.

There is, however, another possible interpretation of the fluctuation of the number of prosecuted cases over the revolutionary decade. It could be argued that such patterns are the result of increased chatter in the anticipation or wake of a particularly disturbing event, for political griping and lack of enthusiasm certainly go hand in hand. While it is true that the years 1793-94 marked a period of intense prosecution of verbal dissent, the volume of dissent also existed because of the controversial government policies of the day. A glance at the topics of discussion for this period confirms the hypothesis: many of the seditious statements for which peasants were arrested in 1793 and 1794 concerned the *assignats*, recruitment policies, and foreign war. Undoubtedly, both principles are at work. The changing attitudes of the authorities will be dealt with in greater detail in chapter IV, but at this point, let us turn our attention to the various topics which held rural interest and alarmed the government, in an attempt to follow the patterns of political chatter in the countryside.

### Topics of Political Discussion

The range of topics which arose in the course of political conversations in the countryside is more vast than might be expected. Rural citizens were interested not only in issues which might visibly affect their daily lives, such as taxes, municipal politics and land distribution, but also in the larger questions of the best form of government and the future of the nation. As before, the number of times that different topics occur in the documentation must not be interpreted as representing the whole of such remarks; however, certain observations can be made regarding the timing and context of such instances. Factors such as the prevailing concerns of the authorities at any given time and rural reactions to specific events and pieces of news figured interchangeably, and should be considered jointly in evaluating the occurrence of certain issues. If, for example, we compare two different topics and their occurrence in the documentation over time, we can see clear links between the topic and the time at which it was most commonly discussed.





The issue of taxation, for example (Figure 3-4), was of great concern near the beginning of the Revolution, as rural citizens wondered whether the new regime would be more or less demanding than the previous one. The same issue was also a popular topic of discussion during the period of greatest crisis, in 1794. As the war effort demanded ever-greater numbers of soldiers and increasing quantities of foodstuffs and other materials, the overall burden on the population was heightened. Complaints about taxes became endemic, and unreasonable fears that the old levies of the *ancien régime* might be reinstated circulated through the countryside. Figure 3-5, on the other hand, which charts expressions of royalist sentiment over time, presents a very different pattern. Outright royalism was seldom prosecuted before the execution of Louis XVI: while the king was still alive, there was still hope for the constitutional monarchy, and, at any rate, such remarks would not have rated highly among the authorities' priorities. As the revolutionary regime became more objectionable, however, longing for the order and stability of the previous era increased. During the Directory era, royalist sentiment waxed and waned as opposing parties fought for control of both the government and the countryside. Each of the different topics commonly raised in rural political discussions followed similar patterns, and each reveals a startling degree of clarity from those deemed, by their contemporaries, to be incapable of political astuteness.<sup>17</sup>

## Religion

The conflict over religion during the French Revolution was arguably one of the most contentious issues of the decade, and would prove a dividing line for generations to come. When the deputies of the National Assembly seized church lands to the profit of the nation, and subsequently undertook to manage the church and provide for the clergy, it is

<sup>17</sup> For a similar breakdown of seditious speech in seventeenth-century England, see Sharp, "Popular Political Opinion".



unlikely that they realised how far-reaching the consequences of their actions would be. The institution of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in July 1790 would tear especially at the fabric of rural society, as those clergymen who refused to swear the oath of “fidelity to the nation, the law, the king and the constitution” were forcibly removed from the parishes of which they were an integral part, to be replaced by oath-swearing newcomers. This process did much to alienate the traditionally-minded Catholic peasantry throughout the nation, as did the campaign of anti-clericalism and dechristianisation, which intensified steadily over the following years. Under the Directory, challenges to the religious settlement were associated with royalist sentiment and a rejection of Republicanism. However, the intensity of prosecution for seditious speech and opinions would never again rise to the level experienced under the Terror, and many parishes - particularly in the distant south-western departments - succeeded in quietly returning to their previous ways.

The importance of this conflict in the countryside is clearly reflected in the frequency of indictments for seditious speech which focus upon the religious question. Moreover, those cases which are concerned with religion are particularly significant because of how they were perceived by the prosecuting authorities: indeed, it was the debate over religion which first led revolutionaries to consider the potential threat of seditious words spoken in the countryside. As we shall see in more detail in chapter IV, reports of the “anti-constitutional discourse” and “seditious sermons” of parish priests flooded the offices of the *comité des rapports* and the *comité des recherches* from 1789 to 1791, painting a picture in which the control of *l'esprit public* by these malicious clerics might well prove dangerous to the regime. The policing of talk on religious issues also illustrates the simplicity of the elite perception of peasant political opinion, as parish priests were invariably portrayed as ill-intentioned troublemakers, whose machinations represented a clear danger to the fragile, child-like minds of the peasants. M. Fauroux, the parish priest of the mountain hamlet of Illartein in the Ariège, was accused of conspiring to sow “la terreur et l'épouvante dans le cœur des âmes faibles et dans l'esprit des personnes pusillanimes”, and the words of Pujol, a priest in the market town of St. Giron, also in the Ariège, were markedly dangerous because he tried to use his influence, with its “caractère sacerdotal, à empêcher le peuple d'ouvrir les yeux à la saine raison...”.<sup>18</sup> It was clearly imaginable, from the perspective of the legislators, that educated, literate

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<sup>18</sup> A.D. Ariège, 11L50-7, Tribunal du district de Saint-Giron, procès contre Fauroux, curé d'Illartein, pour propos séditieux et non-respect de la Constitution, juillet 1791; A.D. Ariège, 8L36-6, procès contre Pujol prêtre, Viguier huissier, et Bigourdan de St. Giron, pour propos tendant à fanatiser et à émeuter le peuple, brumaire II.



intermediaries such as parish priests might use their influence to sway the opinions of others. It would not be until later in the decade that they realised that illiterate peasants, too, were capable of forming political opinions.

Nevertheless, the authorities were correct to be concerned about the effects a *curé*'s words might have on his flock. As a group, parish priests were capable of extremely persuasive discourse: preachers by profession, many village *curés* were remarkably articulate individuals, trained and experienced in speaking with the aim of convincing others. While it is true that, as the Revolution progressed, uneducated inhabitants of the countryside were increasingly arrested for anti-governmental remarks, the rhetorical speeches of the parish priests remain among the most interesting political statements of the sample. The intelligent and shrewd way in which parish priests expressed themselves would also come to their aid in the courtroom: usually more educated and better-read than the municipal officers and local judicial personnel who conducted the investigations, *curés* were often able to turn an interrogation skilfully to their advantage, thus extricating themselves from blame.

Moreover, while peasants were not necessarily blank slates upon which political opinions might be inscribed, parish priests possessed skills and experience in relating to their parishioners which made them effective conduits of ideas. Their knowledge of both French and the local dialect, for example, allowed them to communicate easily with a peasantry whose first language was invariably the latter. Thus, the *procureur* of Beaussac, in the Dordogne, complained that Joseph Guraboeuf, the parish priest, "voulant faire bien sentir et comprendre [ses opinions] à cette partie du peuple qui ne connaît pas trop notre langue, se servit de celle qui lui est plus familière, le patois...".<sup>19</sup> Parish priests also aligned themselves with the register of discourse and realm of experience familiar to the peasantry in order to make themselves understood, often inventing ingenious analogies to explain political concepts to their parishioners. Fauroux, the *curé* of Illartain whom we met earlier, likened his parishioners' decision on the religious conflict to that which was faced in the biblical time of Noah's Ark: those who entered the Ark, he reminded his listeners, were saved, while those who did not were lost.<sup>20</sup> Antoine Tricon, an agricultural labourer in Bondy, in the Lot-et-Garonne, remembered his *curé*'s explanation that just as it was impossible for a *métayer* to replace the owner of the *métairie*, so too was it impossible for

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<sup>19</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 19L75, Tribunal de district de Nontron, procès contre Joseph Guraboeuf, curé de Beaussac, pour discours séditieux, mars-avril 1791.

<sup>20</sup> A.D. Ariège, 11L50-7, procès contre Fauroux, juillet 1791.



laymen to elect bishops; on another occasion, apparently drawing on a common understanding of the hierarchy among rural occupations, the same priest had said “qu’il valait mieux garder des cochons que d’abandonner l’église.”<sup>21</sup> In the pastoral communities of the Pyrenees, incoming constitutional priests were compared to the wolves who leapt on the flocks, an analogy which is absent from the cases collected from the agricultural communities of the Dordogne and Lot-et-Garonne. Indeed, it is easy to understand why the obvious effectiveness of such methods might have concerned the authorities.

From the time of its institution in 1790, the various provisions of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy provided parish priests with plenty of material with which to colour their sermons. Although the proportion of refractory clergy in the south-western departments studied here was no more than the national average,<sup>22</sup> the archives of indictments for seditious speech abound in examples of parish priests explaining to their parishioners why their consciences would not allow them to swear the oath, or why they would only swear it with certain restrictions. One of the chief objections to the new legislation was the transfer of the administration of the Church, and specifically the selection of members of the clergy, from sacred to lay authorities. Parish priests were generally discontented with what they saw as the interference of civil authorities in matters which were none of their affair, and this opinion emerged regularly in sermons and discussions with parishioners. Jean Fossat, the vicar of Lescousse (Ariège), preached that the members of the *Assemblée nationale* were charlatans and monsters, and that instead of taking on spiritual matters, they should work on the land for awhile.<sup>23</sup> An even stronger expression of this point of view is to be found in the case against Gain de Montagnac, the bishop of the Hautes-Pyrénées.<sup>24</sup> When news spread that Montagnac intended to preach in Tarbes in March 1791, people travelled from all over the department to hear him. His sermon, however, consisted in an explanation of his refusal to swear the oath required by “l’horrible décret rendu dans le mois de novembre”. If the temporal powers had taken his

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<sup>21</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17-1, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Pierre Monceret, curé de Bondy, pour propos qui attaquent la Constitution, février 1792; witnesses no. 3 and 13, interrogated 19 février 1792.

<sup>22</sup> Tackett, *Religion, Revolution and Regional Culture*, p. 53, and Claude Langlois *et al.*, *Religion, 1770-1820*, vol. 9 of the series, *Atlas de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1996), p. 32. See also Jean-Claude Meyer, *La vie religieuse en Haute-Garonne sous la Révolution, 1789-1801* (Toulouse, 1982). Although in certain areas, such as the district of La Barthe in the eastern *Hautes-Pyrénées* and the districts of central and western Dordogne, less than 50% of the clergy swore to uphold the Civil Constitution, overall, the regions studied clearly fell within the less refractory areas of France.

<sup>23</sup> A.D. Ariège, 10L31-10, Tribunal du district de Mirepoix, and A.N. D XXIX 2 (16), Comité des rapports; procès contre Jean Fossat, vicaire de Lescousse, pour prône contre la constitution, août 1791.

<sup>24</sup> A.N. D XXIX 12, Comité des Rapports, Plainte contre M. Gain de Montagnac, évêque des Hautes-Pyrénées, prévenu d’avoir excité le clergé...et les citoyens...à une rébellion contre la loi sur la Constitution civile du clergé, mars-septembre 1791.



lands and his wealth, he said, he would not have argued, but they had dared to meddle in the spiritual realm. While stating that the National Assembly's decrees were "contraires à la religion" and certainly not pleasing to God, Montagnac conceded that they were the result not of ill intentions but of a lack of understanding, and he asked those assembled to pray that God might enlighten the legislators "pour faire des meilleurs lois."<sup>25</sup>

Not all members of the clergy, however, were so charitable. In many cases, parish priests took the implications of the Civil Constitution one step further, and publicly despaired that "Religion itself" would be destroyed by the actions of the revolutionaries.<sup>26</sup> The government's denial of the Pope's authority and its increasing involvement in church affairs led local clergy to liken the constitutional church to something approaching Protestantism, a remarkably astute point. "L'assemblée nationale", declared the *curé* of Caumont (Ariège) from his pulpit, "est composée de protestants, et par leur système, ils détruisent la religion."<sup>27</sup> This vein of thinking was extremely common: in nearby Lescousse, the *curé* argued that the new bishop and priests must not be acknowledged, on the grounds that they were "Calvinistes, Luthériens and Schismatiques",<sup>28</sup> and another clergyman gave a fiery sermon which likened the possible consequences of the schism to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre.<sup>29</sup>

The reaction of the rural clergy to the religious policy of the Revolution went even deeper, however, than objections to specific clauses and provisions. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy gravely offended and upset local *curés*, and their statements to parishioners reveal the anger, bitterness and frustration which it caused. The choice set before each parish priest was an extremely difficult one, and whether he chose to go against the teachings of the church or to abandon his post and his parishioners, the new legislation would have affected him profoundly on both a personal and a professional level. The vicar of Beauregard, in the Dordogne, expressed his frustration one evening in a sudden colourful outburst, when he exclaimed, "que si Jésus Christ descendait du ciel en terre, il serait crucifié de nouveau, et que s'il voulait opérer un second ministère d'incarnation,

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* Montagnac in fact encouraged his parishioners to swear the civic oath, as it did not "touche au spirituel".

<sup>26</sup> There are many instances of priests accused of saying that the National Assembly would "anéantir la religion"; see, for example, A.D. Ariège, 11L50-4, Tribunal du district de St. Girons, procès contre Jacques Rogale, *curé* de Caumont, pour non-respect de la Constitution, juin-août 1791.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> A.D. Ariège, 10L31-10, and A.N. D XXIX 2 (16), procès contre Fossat, août 1791.

<sup>29</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 19L75, procès contre Guraboeuf, mars-avril 1791.



l'Assemblée nationale y mettrait des entraves, en lui imposant une loi."<sup>30</sup> Through what seems to have been a combination of conviction and vengeance, many resentful priests began to sabotage the government's efforts, working to ensure that their parishioners would reject the incoming replacement. The archives of indictments for seditious speech abound in charges against *curés* who told their parishioners that their replacements would not be real priests, and that their masses and other sacraments would be invalid and even harmful. Rogale, the curé of Caumont (Ariège), told his parishioners that the mass said by a *prêtre assermenté* would be worthless, and that there would be no point in hearing it;<sup>31</sup> another priest said that it would be worth less than a mass said by a Protestant.<sup>32</sup> Even more picturesque was the frequent analogy that it would be better to pray to an oak tree than to attend the mass of a constitutional priest; variations upon this theme included praying in one's house, beside one's bed, to a rock, or, somewhat oddly, to a mare, as preferable acts of devotion.<sup>33</sup>

Other dissidents painted a still bleaker picture. Several defendants reportedly told their parishioners that they would be excommunicated and even damned if they attended the mass of a constitutional priest, with one embellishing further, threatening that those who heard the false mass would become "aussi noirs que les diables au fond des enfers".<sup>34</sup> The frightening spectre of invalid sacraments was even more compelling, and many parish priests advised the faithful to do without a priest rather than to obtain the services of a constitutional one. Rogale, again, proclaimed that it was better to be buried in the wine cellar than to have a burial consecrated by a *prêtre assermenté*, and that parents should find a refractory priest to baptise their children.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the greatest fear, however, was that of an illegitimate marriage. In several trials, defendants reportedly warned their parishioners that the consummation of a marriage blessed by a constitutional priest would be a grievous sin, and Gain de Montagnac, the bishop of the Hautes-Pyrénées whom we

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<sup>30</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 17L14, Tribunal du district de Montignac, procès contre Luguet, vicaire de Beauregard, pour propos inconstitutionnels et injurieux, mai-juin 1791.

<sup>31</sup> A.D. Ariège, 11L50-4, procès contre Rogale, juin-août 1791.

<sup>32</sup> A.D. Ariège, 11L50-5, Tribunal du district de St. Giron, procès contre Jean Joula, curé de St-Araille, pour non-respect de la constitution; interrogation, 22 août 1791.

<sup>33</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17-1, procès contre Monceret, février 1792; A.D. Ariège, 11L50-7, procès contre Fauroux, juillet 1791; A.D. Ariège, 11L50-4, procès contre Rogale, juin-août 1791, witness no. 1; A.D. Ariège, 11L50-5, procès contre Joula, août 1791.

<sup>34</sup> A.N. D XXIX 6, Comité des Rapports, Information contre le Sieur Darbas prêtre inconstitutionnel, de Saint-Sulpice, Haute-Garonne, pour propos infames et séditeux contre la Constitution civile du Clergé, août 1791; A.D. Ariège, 10L31-10 and A.N. D XXIX 2 (16), procès contre Fossat, août 1791; A.D. Dordogne, 19L75, procès contre Guraboeuf, mars-avril 1791; A.D. Ariège, 11L50-4, procès contre Rogale, juin-août 1791. The phrase "aussi noir que les diables" comes from the Rogale trial.

<sup>35</sup> A.D. Ariège, 11L50-4, procès contre Rogale, juin-août 1791.



heard from regarding the inappropriateness of laymen electing church officials, intoned that the marriages performed by constitutional priests would be "concubinages".<sup>36</sup> More than one priest was denounced by a groom or new husband terrified that his soul was about to be condemned to eternal damnation.<sup>37</sup>

Once the new *curé constitutionnel* arrived, the refractory priest was allowed to remain in the parish so long as he did not "trouble l'ordre public."<sup>38</sup> However, a number of indictments for seditious speech resulted from this co-habitation of the parish, particularly when the displaced priest had been especially vehement about the ills of the Civil Constitution. Some refractory priests continued to perform illicit masses, reassuring their parishioners that they would always be their true *curés*.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, while authorities had not at first accepted the possibility that seditious opinions might come from the peasants themselves, the divisiveness of the religious conflict soon changed this, and villagers were increasingly arrested for seditious words uttered in support of their *anciens curés*. The new *curé* himself would be taunted and mistreated, being called a wolf in sheep's clothing, a pig, the devil, or, most often, simply and hurtfully, "l'intrus". The citizens of the *bourg* of Sorges, in the Dordogne, said that "ils voulaient garder l'ancien curé, [car] le nouveau curé n'était pas un brave homme."<sup>40</sup> Parishioners who dared to attend the mass of the constitutional replacement were harassed: in the market town of Saverdun, in the Ariège, people said that "ceux qui assistaient aux offices divins du curé constitutionnel auraient la langue percée, seront marqués au front et tondus",<sup>41</sup> and the *insurgés* of the well-known 1793 disturbance of the Boulbonne, in the Lot-et-Garonne,

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<sup>36</sup> A.N. D XXIX 12, Plainte contre M. Gain de Montagnac, mars-septembre 1791.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, A.D. Dordogne, 19L75, procès contre Guraboeuf, mars-avril 1791, testimony of Henri Planchard.

<sup>38</sup> On 29 November 1791, the National Assembly decreed that refractory priests would be forced to leave their homes "only if the area is affected by religious dissension", or if they provoked disturbances. In May and August 1792, a provision was made for the deportation of refractory clerics upon the request of a considerable number of active citizens, and on 26 August 1793, the National Convention decreed that all refractory priests would be deported. It was not until the law of 3 ventôse III that the institution of religious freedom permitted refractory priests to return to their parishes; Jones, *Longman Companion*, pp. 242-4. See the discussion of the initial decree, and particularly the response of Louis-François François, *cultivateur* and deputy of the Pas-de-Calais: A.P. vol.35, pp.140-6, 18 novembre 1791.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, the following cases: A.D. Ariège, 11L50-5, procès contre Jougla, août 1791; A.D. Ariège, 8L33-9, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Joseph Mathe et d'autres, artisans, pour troubles séditieux, avril 1793; and A.D. Haute-Garonne, 7L202U-53, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Jean-Pierre Duchain, prêtre de Pointis-Isnard, pour non-observation des décrets, 17 brumaire II.

<sup>40</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L63, Tribunal révolutionnaire, procès contre Pierre-Elie Lasescuras, curé, pour propos et agissements inconstitutionnels, brumaire II. For another example of *attroupement* in favour of a well-liked refractory priest, see A.D. Ariège, 8L34-4, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Jean-Baptiste Delcurrou, ménager, pour attroupement et émeutes populaires.

<sup>41</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-14, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Benoit Lamarque, tailleur d'habits, pour chants inciviques et libertins, septembre-octobre 1793.



told the faithful that “les messes du curé constitutionnel ne valaient rien, qu’il déjeunait et se soulait avant de les dire.”<sup>42</sup>

Also common were incidents of seditious speech connected with the campaign of dechristianisation. As the outward signs of Catholicism – particularly crosses and statues of saints – were ordered removed, rural citizens found numerous ways in which to express their dissatisfaction. In some instances, these consisted in simple statements of opinion on government policy: thus Olivier Roessard, an agricultural worker from the area of St-Girons, in the Ariège, stated that while he was a “bon républicain, ...il ne voulait pas qu’on touche aux croix”, and that “il verserait son sang pour la religion.”<sup>43</sup> More often, however, and more disturbing to the authorities, dissatisfaction with policies on dechristianisation threatened to lead to outright rebellion. Broliat, the refractory priest still in residence in the commune of Marsillac, in the Dordogne, was arrested in the spring of 1794 for plotting to ambush the district seat, “pour soutenir la religion et empêcher la démolition des croix”,<sup>44</sup> and Lachèze, ex-curé of Beleymas, also in the Dordogne, remarked bitterly that “s’il avait à son commandement deux cent mille hommes il aurait mis la ville de Bergerac en cendres et [le représentant-en-mission] Lakanal avec elle, pour lui avoir enlevé les vases de son église.”<sup>45</sup>

Two other aspects of the campaign of dechristianisation gave rise to incidents of seditious speech. The attack on church bells caused a great deal of consternation; as mentioned in chapter I, bells were a symbol not only of worship but also of community and of the agricultural way of life. Citizens in villages across the south-west tried both to resist the removal of their bells in the summer of 1793, and to recapture them from local *dépôts nationaux* in the following years. In one case, a rumour circulated through the rural cantons of the district of Villeneuve, Lot-et-Garonne, in January 1796, that villagers could reclaim their bells from the *dépôt national*; as a result, a large group of peasants and artisans apparently absconded with nineteen bells, before being arrested for theft of

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<sup>42</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L35-2, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Antoine Layrix, et d’autres, laboureurs et artisans, pour attroupements contre-révolutionnaires, août-sept 1793. The incident is also discussed at length in P. Marty, *Trois localités de l’Ariège: la-Bastide-de-Lordat, Le Carbare, Trémoulet et la région située à l’orient de Pamiers* (Foix, 1909), pp. 212-35.

<sup>43</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-5, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Olivier Roessard, laboureur, pour propos tendant à l’insurrection, brumaire II.

<sup>44</sup> A.N. W 420, dossier 955, Tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris, procès contre Jean-Baptiste Broliat, ci-devant curé de Marsillac, Dordogne, pour incitation à la révolte, floréal II.

<sup>45</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L44, Tribunal révolutionnaire, procès contre Pierre Lachèze, curé de Beleymas, et d’autres, pour excitation à attroupement séditieux, nivôse II.



national property.<sup>46</sup> The revolutionary calendar and its replacement of Sundays and church holidays with *décadis* and *fêtes révolutionnaires* also gave rise to some discussion, as dissident rural citizens criticised others for following the prescriptions of the law. The *comité révolutionnaire* of Périgueux, in the Dordogne, for example, was alerted to the seditious words of a certain Gauthier, *dit* Viroulet, a *marchand* from the village of Fouleix, who had been found verbally abusing citizens, in the various inns and taverns where he stopped on his travels, for working on the *fête de notre dame*.<sup>47</sup>

The fact that the religious policies adopted during the Revolution figured strongly among the factors responsible for the alienation of the peasantry is well-known. Nevertheless, the frequency and the passion of rural citizens' statements about religion, recorded in the archives of seditious speech, provide both colourful illustrations and significant microcosms of rural experience. The longevity of the issue is clear from the ongoing chatter during the Thermidorian Reaction and the Directory, when calls for the "rétablissement de la religion" were closely associated with anti-republicanism and royalist sentiment. Some of this impetus came from refractory priests, who had emerged from hiding and hoped to take advantage of the relative instability of the post-Thermidorian governments to encourage peasants to reject the revolutionary regime. Hence Antoine Leymarie, the *curé* of the village of Prat, in the Dordogne, addressed his parishioners:

Consultez votre coeur et dites-moi si vous n'étiez pas plus heureux anciennement qu'aujourd'hui... depuis la Révolution, il y avait des personnes qui s'étaient revêtues de la peau de l'agneau pour faire les loups, et qu'en prêchant la Liberté, et l'Égalité, ils ne voulaient que mettre le pied sur la gorge du peuple. Parlez à ces gens-là; il n'y a plus de dieu, Dieu a perdu son nom, ils vous diront l'Être Suprême...<sup>48</sup>

In the same vein, a young man named Rajade, who had been an abbot before the Revolution, was arrested for having said, at a country fair in the Lot-et-Garonne, "qu'il fallait faire la contre-révolution et rétablir le clergé dans ses premiers droits."<sup>49</sup> Other instances show the same sort of reasoning coming from non-clerical rural citizens. In the

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<sup>46</sup> All of the defendants were acquitted by the jury, as they had sincerely believed they were authorised to remove the bells; see A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L264, pièces 34-38, Tribunal criminel, information relative à l'enlèvement de cloches du dépôt national, pluviôse-germinal IV. For other cases involving bells, see A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L98-35, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Marguerite Dasti, pour attroupement pour le maintien des cloches, germinal II; and A.D. Dordogne 24L44, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Jean Laugénie, cultivateur, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires et provocation au trouble, floréal III.

<sup>47</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Tribunal révolutionnaire, procès contre Pierre Gauthier, *dit* Viroulet, marchand, pour propos séditieux tendant à égarer le peuple, germinal II.

<sup>48</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 2U31-1, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Antoine Leymarie, prêtre, pour propos contre la République, tendants à inspirer non seulement du mépris, mais même de la haine pour le gouvernement républicain, fructidor V; witnesses no. 1 and 5.

<sup>49</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, procès contre Rajade, germinal IV.



small valley centre of Massat, at the foot of the Pyrenees in the Ariège, the National Guard was forced to put down a royalist insurrection in thermidor VII. Their efforts were thwarted by local peasants, who reportedly challenged them by saying:

Vous allez chassez les brigands, vous l'êtes vous-mêmes, car ce sont au contraire de braves gens qui viennent nous rétablir la religion, vive le Roi! Ils portent la croix de Saint Louis, arrachent les arbres de la liberté, replantent les croix... on va avoir un roi et la religion.<sup>50</sup>

Clearly, religion continued to be a central issue for rural citizens through to the end of the revolutionary decade, and one which led them to make a political stand.

### Economic issues

Although the turmoil over the religious issue was unique in some ways – with discontent registering on an emotional level as well as a political one, and with many of the defendants, the articulate, persuasive *curés* themselves – it was far from being the only topic of rural political discussion. Other subjects of contention, including financial policy, recruitment, foreign war and political organization, reveal an increase not only in the number of adamant speakers, but also in the variety of places of political discussion, as we move away from the privileged tribune of the pulpit to include all of the other crossroads of eighteenth-century society. The first of these topics, economic issues, might at first seem like a traditional or even stereotypical rubric for any discussion of peasant political action. After all, disputes over tax collection were hardly a new phenomenon, and grain riots had been endemic in the countryside for generations.<sup>51</sup> Undoubtedly, there are many aspects of continuity in rural economic crises, from the eighteenth century through to the revolutionary period and even beyond. However, the comments and opinions voiced during the Revolution are significant for several reasons. First of all, while peasants had almost certainly voiced their opinions about taxes, grain prices and the like prior to 1789, it was not until the Revolution that such words interested the authorities, and were therefore recorded in the archive. As with the entire sample of indictments for seditious speech, such statements became more significant during the Revolution because for the first time, laws existed in order to punish not only the actions of peasants – the *attroupements*, *rébellions*

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<sup>50</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L70-1, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Barthélémy Delpy Lavergne, et d'autres, cultivateurs, pour propos séditieux et provocation à la royauté, thermidor VII.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Bouton, *The Flour War*, Tilly, "The Food Riot", and Thomas, *Temps des Foires*, pp. 216-22; also Kaplan, *Famine Plot Persuasion*; Jean Nicolas (ed.), *Mouvements populaires et conscience sociale, XVI<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles: Actes du colloque de Paris, 24-26 mai 1984* (Paris, 1985), and the special issue of the *Cahiers internationaux d'Histoire économique et sociale*, 6 (1976), entitled "Les mouvements paysans dans le monde contemporain", especially the contribution of Philippe Vigier, "Mouvements paysans dans le cadre de l'agriculture et de la société traditionnelles", pp. 17-35.



à justice and insurrections – but also their words, whether these actually led to seditious activity, or indeed had only the potential to do so. This redirection of official preoccupations signalled a new departure with respect to the role of rural inhabitants in the political sphere. Gradually, over the course of the revolutionary decade, attitudes towards the formation of rural political opinion changed, making what was said in country taverns of interest to those working to uphold public order.

Even on traditionally disputed topics, such as the price of bread or the scarcity of grain and other commodities, there was a new, more politicised tone to cases of seditious speech after the first months of the Revolution. The poor harvests which had plagued the countryside in the years immediately preceding the Revolution continued after 1789, and the situation was compounded with the declaration of war in 1792 and the resulting strain on the economy. Rumours of the scarcity of food in neighbouring regions and of inflated prices circulated wildly. The squares echoed with political statements, as peasants spoke out against the free circulation of grain, seeking to keep resources at hand and away from the ravenous mouths of the towns and armies,<sup>52</sup> while simultaneously arguing for the maintenance of the *maximum*, which kept those resources affordable.<sup>53</sup> In the summer of 1793, Jean-Louis Abadie, a *cultivateur* from the village of Camparan, in the Hautes-Pyrénées, reported, upon his return from the market in Tarbes, that grain was selling for the outrageous price of 100 *livres* and 12 *pistoles* per sack. As it turned out, this false news was connected to the fear that the *maximum* on grain might be revoked, and Abadie, in his defence, insisted that he had only passed on what he had been told. Nevertheless, when Abadie was brought before the district court in the nearby town, the authorities explained their fears, emphasizing the danger represented by “les fausses nouvelles débitées dans les places publiques et surtout celles relatives aux subsistances dans les circonstances

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<sup>52</sup> See, for example, in the *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), vol. 2, pp. 321-9, procès contre Lachaud, domestique et Lagorce, cultivateur, pour attroupement ayant pour objet d’empêcher la libre circulation des grains, II.

<sup>53</sup> For examples of statements concerning the *maximum*, see the following trials: A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Jean Barus pour avoir proposé d’échanger, moyennant bénéfice, des assignats pour du numéraire, ventôse II; A.D. Ariège, 10L37-1, Tribunal du district de Mirepoix, procès contre Raymond Page, dit Pistole, meunier, pour propos tendant à discréditer les assignats, pluviôse II; A.D. Dordogne, 24L42, Tribunal révolutionnaire, procès contre Jean Bernard, dit Biotte, cultivateur, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires tendant à avilir et à dissoudre la Convention nationale, à discréditer les assignats, etc., pluviôse II, and 24L63, procès contre Lasescuras, brumaire II; A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-15, Tribunal révolutionnaire, procès contre Jean Boué, jardinier, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires, nivôse II.



où nous sommes.”<sup>54</sup>

The relentless requisitioning of grain and other agricultural products added fuel to the fire, breeding dissatisfaction with a government perceived as neither understanding nor caring about the provincial population. Jean d’Argelès, for example, a *laboureur* from Villefranque, again in the Hautes-Pyrénées, was arrested for resisting the municipal officers who were carrying out a requisition order, objecting that the grain he had left was not even sufficient for his household.<sup>55</sup> A petition sent by the valley community of Siguer, in the Ariège, shows typical frustration with government insensitivity to local conditions. Did the authorities really think, wrote the village council, that it was prudent to requisition grain needed to feed the population until the following harvest?<sup>56</sup> Villagers in other mountain areas expressed disbelief at demands for crops, such as wheat and barley, which were simply not grown in their region. The disgruntled made good use of rural sensitivity to economic problems in disparaging the Republican regime; in the spring of 1794, for example, a man named Jean Fournier attempted to stir up trouble in the district of Bergerac when he told the villagers “qu’il passerait un commissaire national pour requérir tous les foins”, and that “s’il ne leur restait pas assez de fourages pour nourrir leurs bestiaux, ils n’avaient qu’à les manger.”<sup>57</sup> Consider, too, the rumour spread by another defendant, Jean Dartenset, an innkeeper from Vergt (Dordogne), in floréal II, that the Turkish Emperor had sent an ambassador to Paris with an offer of grain and other means of subsistence, conditional on the coronation of Louis XVII.<sup>58</sup> If the government refused, the story went, the Turks were ready to send an army of 100,000 men to fight with the coalition against France. Although most of Dartenset’s listeners were sufficiently informed to discount the wild suggestion, his words undoubtedly struck a chord in those hovering at the subsistence level, and the political implication – that the government might reject the offer of aid, and leave them to starve – did not go unnoticed.

The prevalence of politicised comments on government economic policy in the countryside is significant evidence of rural political awareness. Increasingly, a link was

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<sup>54</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L justice non-côtée, Tribunal du district de la Neste, procès contre Jean-Louis Abadie, cultivateur, et Jean-Baptiste Tronc-Bernis, homme de loi, pour avoir répandu une fausse nouvelle, juillet-août 1793.

<sup>55</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Jean d’Argelès, dit Tucoulet, laboureur, pour offense à la loi et outrage aux officiers municipaux, messidor II.

<sup>56</sup> A.D. Ariège, 97 Edép D2, Délibérations du conseil municipal de Siguer, 1793 - II.

<sup>57</sup> A.N. W420-955, Tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris, and *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), vol. 2, pp. 113-4, procès contre Jean Fournier, dit Carré, cultivateur, pour délits contre-révolutionnaires et propos tendants à jeter l’alarme, germinal-prairial II.

<sup>58</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L40, procès contre Dartenset, floréal II.



being made between local issues and the national government which had instituted them: not only were economic problems the fault of the government, provincial citizens were saying, but as a popular, elected assembly, that government had a certain responsibility to resolve them. The *assignats*, for example, were the subject of many disparaging remarks, and also a particularly sensitive issue for the government. The use of paper currency was a relatively new experiment,<sup>59</sup> and popular confidence, or the lack thereof, could determine the success or failure of the finances of the nation. There is certainly evidence that rural citizens were attempting to survive while using the unstable notes, but the fact that it was considered far better to retain any hard currency one might have is clear from repeated statements. The policing of marketplaces regularly turned up individuals attempting to negotiate a favourable exchange, most of whom feigned surprise at learning that such a course of action was a serious offence.

In fact, judicial sanctions against those decrying the national currency were superfluous: rural citizens had not needed the statements of the government to confirm that the *assignats* were suffering from massive inflation, for they were soon worth little more than the paper upon which they were printed. One small landowner observed that “ce faible papier était la cause que l’on ne pouvait pas faire ses affaires, et qu’avec de l’argent on les faisait beaucoup mieux.”<sup>60</sup> The words of a poor sharecropper from the Périgord were even stronger. Jean Bernard, *dit* Biotte, was among a large group of villagers gathered on the public square of Verteillac (Dordogne) on a Sunday afternoon, ‘discussing various things’, when he was heard to say that the *assignats* no longer had any value, that they were nothing but worthless bits of paper, and that those who had them would be ruined. He then proceeded to remove some official notices from the church door, some of which concerned the *assignats*, saying, “j’ai besoin des clous pour brider mes sabots, et des papiers j’en torcherai mon...”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, *assignats* were so widely considered worthless that when a district court in Tarascon offered to compensate a witness for her expenses, she didn’t think twice before retorting that at least she could use the paper as floor-covering, and soon

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<sup>59</sup> Although various forms of paper notes circulated in the eighteenth century, from the bills issued by John Law’s bank in 1719-20 to the various bills of exchange and promisory notes used locally, the *assignats* were the first attempt to have a national currency in France with forced adoption. Rebecca Spang, “Vrai ou faux: Les assignats ont sauvé la France”, paper given at the 48<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the S.F.H.S. (Toronto, Canada), 13 April 2002, and personal communication, April-May 2002; see also Seymour Edwin Harris, *The Assignats* (Cambridge, Mass., 1930).

<sup>60</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L51-3, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Pierre Nicolas Lantourne, cultivateur, pour propos tendant à discréditer les assignats, ventôse-germinal II.

<sup>61</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L42, procès contre Bernard, *dit* Biotte, pluviôse II.



found herself in the defendant's box instead of the witness' chair.<sup>62</sup>

Another significant aspect of the government's economic policy, that of tax collection, received an understandably large share of attention in rural discussions. There were certainly those who expressed their satisfaction with the destruction of the old system: Jean Boué, for example, who had previously been a gardener on a noble estate, admitted that he had never been well-treated by his employer and that he was happy to learn that he would now have to pay taxes with the rest of them.<sup>63</sup> In some cases, typically wily peasants took advantage of the confusion to avoid paying taxes altogether. In the summer of 1790, a 50-year-old *laboureur* named Sicaire Linard took advantage of his position as secretary of the tiny hamlet of Léguilhac de l'Auche, in the Dordogne, to announce to an assembly of villagers that new decrees had arrived prohibiting sharecroppers from paying the dues which they owed their landlords.<sup>64</sup> Much later, in a well-documented trial, Jeanne Floissac, an innkeeper's wife in the market town of Casseneuil, in the Lot-et-Garonne, was brought up on charges of *propos inciviques* for having suggested, in the presence of her customers, that "puisque'il n'y a pas de roi on ne doit pas payer d'imposition."<sup>65</sup> In the early months of the Revolution, the cabarets and marketplaces had echoed with politicised chatter as rural citizens tried to work out the likelihood that the Old Regime taxes would return. Cadot d'Argeneuil, the justice of the peace of the canton of Montflanquin, also in the Lot-et-Garonne, took advantage of this fear, threatening to bring back the *rentes seigneuriales* if he was not elected at the *assemblées primaires*.<sup>66</sup>

While these cases are certainly part of a long tradition of peasant resistance to taxation, many of the indictments for seditious speech on this topic revealed not only a basic dislike of taxation in general, but also an evaluation of the changes in taxation policy brought on by the new administration. Once it was understood that the National Assembly

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<sup>62</sup> A.D. Ariège, 13L24-1, Tribunal correctionnel du district de Tarascon, procès contre Marguerite Cazes, salariée, pour avoir jeté le discrédit sur les assignats, floréal IV.

<sup>63</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-15, procès contre Boué.

<sup>64</sup> A.D. Dordogne, B843-2, Sénéchaussée de Périgueux, procès contre Sicaire Linard, secrétaire, accusé d'avoir publié à haute voix... que de nouveaux décrets prohibaient..., août-septembre 1790. Another case, in the village of Cabans, also in the Dordogne, provides a second example which is nearly identical, except that in Cabans, the principal defendant, Laval, was condemned to death for his role in the ensuing *attroupements*, whereas the case against Linard was dropped. A.D. Dordogne, B1701, Sénéchaussée de Sarlat, procès contre Laval, dit Répare, et d'autres, pour incitation à attroupements, avril 1790.

<sup>65</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17-8 and 2L97-22, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Jeanne Floissac, épouse de Bernard Constant, aubergiste, pour propos inciviques et provocation au rétablissement de la royauté, juillet-août 1793. See also Marcel Massip, "Scènes et types de l'époque révolutionnaire: La «Floissaquette», aubergiste à Casseneuil, avait-elle commis le crime de provocation au rétablissement de la royauté?", *Revue de l'Agenais*, 83 (1957), pp. 169-184.

<sup>66</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L98-33 and 2L105-10, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Cadot d'Argeneuil, juge de paix et ci-devant noble, pour calomnie contre la nation, pluviôse-germinal II.



had not abolished taxation, but had simply rebaptised the *tithe* and other royal taxes with the more democratic name of “contributions”, the statements collected by police investigators reflected an attempt to understand and gauge the authorities’ intentions. Lamartigne, an educated notary who travelled throughout the countryside availing villagers of his services, was arrested in 1793 when he was heard to mutter that “le gouvernement, en parlant de liberté, attrapait l’argent du peuple.”<sup>67</sup> The creation of two main direct taxes where only one had been before – the first on landed wealth and the second on movable possessions – would continue to cause confusion and resentment throughout the revolutionary decade. The daughter-in-law of Jean Suc, a farmer, appears to have spoken for the entire village of Combes in the Lot-et-Garonne when she responded to the tax-collector’s knock at the door by saying that under the monarchy, she had only had to pay one tax, whereas the National Assembly expected her to pay twice, which clearly made them thieves.<sup>68</sup> François Carles, the collector in question, turned back towards town in frustration as Suc’s neighbours all shut their doors tightly against the intrusion. The belief that the overall amount had actually increased since 1790 was a commonly-voiced problem, and – interestingly enough – one which has been tentatively verified by economic historians.<sup>69</sup> Such acumen is remarkably common. Indeed, as it became clear that despite the financial theories of the revolutionaries, the new economy was not very healthy, rural inhabitants began to incorporate comments on financial policy in their assessments of the Republican form of government in general. As Thomas Bordas, a weaver from the tiny village of Segonzac in the Dordogne, succinctly put it, “qu’autrefois, quand un seul touchait les deniers publics, on était mieux, attendu que dans le régime actuel on avait des pleines mains d’assignats et qu’on n’en pouvait rien faire.”<sup>70</sup>

One final issue in economic policy, that of the *biens nationaux*, or sale of the nationalised properties of the church and nobility, appears with a certain frequency in the documentation, particularly after Thermidor. Occasionally, the question is raised in

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<sup>67</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-9, procès contre Lamartigne, germinal II.

<sup>68</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L84-5, Tribunal criminel, procès contre la bru du citoyen Jean Suc, pour provocation au rétablissement de la royauté et empêchement de la perception des contributions, fructidor V - frimaire VI.

<sup>69</sup> Louis de Cardenal, “Le citoyen de 1791 payait-il plus ou moins d’impôts que le sujet de 1790?”, *Notices, Inventaires et Documents*, 22 (1936), pp. 59-110; Godechot, *Les Institutions*, pp. 163-74. As de Cardenal explains, the inequality of *ancien régime* taxation and the unevenness of relevant documentation in the early years of the Revolution makes a definitive answer difficult to provide. However, it is far from clear that the endeavours of the National Assembly reduced the financial burden on the people, without even taking into account the frequent produce and livestock requisitions.

<sup>70</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L45-260, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Thomas Bordas, tisserand, pour discours séditieux, pluviôse IV.



connection with the perceived destruction of the church: the speaker challenged the government's position on religion, arguing that the clergy should be re-established in its traditional rights.<sup>71</sup> More often, however, the issue is seen as a socio-political one. Using logic based upon a traditional view of society, peasants argued that those wealthier rural inhabitants who had been able to purchase *biens nationaux* were the "winners" of the Revolution, and that therefore they should take their place as the defenders of it.<sup>72</sup> In the Pyrenean commune of Lézat, for example, Louis Peyronnel *fils*, a plasterer, was indicted for rebelling against the execution of decrees requisitioning soldiers for the army, and shouting that "les acquéreurs des biens nationaux devaient partir et non les volontaires."<sup>73</sup> In a similar case, Bertrand Sibiale, an inhabitant of the mountain hamlet of Ercé (Ariège), was arrested for his involvement in a rumour that the soldiers who had defended the Republic were entitled to take over some of the local *biens nationaux*.<sup>74</sup>

The reverse side of the coin, however, was that the fate of those who had acquired *biens nationaux* was closely tied to the fate of the Republican regime. Harbingers of the return of the monarchy – those who expressed royalist sentiments, or who made false announcements that the army had suffered setbacks – sometimes gave a warning of sorts for those whose recently gained wealth depended upon the new order. The indictment of Cadot d'Argeneuil, the seditious *juge de paix* from the Lot-et-Garonne whom we met earlier, also reads that he had threatened that "si les émigrés revenaient...comme il y avait lieu de croire, les acquéreurs des biens nationaux en seraient dépouillés et réduits à l'aumône."<sup>75</sup> Parié Galet, a poor inhabitant of the town of Nérac in the same department, verbally abused a rich landowner on the road leading into town, saying "tu as acheté du Bien de la nation, va te le défendre, sinon l'on te le reprendra."<sup>76</sup> Clearly, politicised statements such as these are vastly different from the grain riots and tax revolts of earlier generations.

## Recruitment and war

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<sup>71</sup> See, for example, A.D. Ariège, 11L50-4, procès contre Rogale, juin-août 1791.

<sup>72</sup> Sometimes speakers were quite bitter about the matter. One individual, for example, called them 'voleurs'; A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L237-109, Tribunal correctionnel de Nérac, procès contre Jean-Baptiste Peyriague, cultivateur, pour querelle d'auberge, thermidor V.

<sup>73</sup> A.D. Ariège 14L14-1, Tribunal correctionnel de Pamiers, procès contre Louis Peyronnel et d'autres, artisans et militaires, pour propos séditieux, nivôse IV.

<sup>74</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L50-2, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Bertrand Sibiale, militaire, et d'autres, pour attroupement séditieux, vendémiaire-pluviôse IV; see also A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, procès contre Rajade, germinal IV.

<sup>75</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L98-33 and 2L105-10, procès contre Cadot d'Argeneuil, pluviôse-germinal II.

<sup>76</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L240, procès contre Galet, messidor VII.



As the Revolution wore on, a deepening sense of crisis, caused by the spectre of foreign war, depreciation of the *assignats*, execution of the king and institution of the reign of Terror, had the dual effect of provoking increased talk in the countryside, and leading authorities to monitor ever more closely what seditious statements were being made. The endless requests for soldiers became a volatile issue in the countryside, as the *bras utiles* of the village were stripped from an already precarious rural economy. Just like countless generations of country folk before them, the peasantry of the south-west, and particularly of the isolated foothills and mountain valleys,<sup>77</sup> resented the disruption to their lives caused by foreign war. Moreover, as very few citizens living in 1793 would have had first-hand knowledge of the hardship and levies of the wars of the monarchy, the audacity and brazenness of the revolutionary governments took all the blame for the ills that befell the Republic. Jeanne Floissac, the *aubergiste* whom we met earlier, was also reported to have confided to those in her tavern, “j’aimerais bien plus les républicains si nous avions la paix.”<sup>78</sup> One ex-noble who was arrested for attempting to stir up royalist sentiment in the local market-town made use of this type of argument, when he said that “jusqu’à ce qu’il y aurait un roi, nous ne serions jamais tranquilles, mais que d’abord [*sic*] que nous l’aurions, nous aurions de suite la paix.”<sup>79</sup>

The judicial archives of the revolutionary period provide an enormous number of indictments against those in particular who tried either to dissuade young volunteers from joining the army, or to persuade soldiers to leave their posts.<sup>80</sup> Naturally, the departure of sons and husbands for an uncertain fate was a very emotional issue, and more than one father was arrested for protesting against the forced enrolment of his son, only to be released later when it was decided that his words had not actually been intended to oppose the entire recruitment process.<sup>81</sup> However, some cases appear to have had more political motivations than others. Catherine Lavigne, for example, a middle-aged servant living in the town of Pamiers, at the foothills of the Pyrenees in the Ariège, was reportedly offering to help hide young men in the vineyards: they would have at least three weeks, she

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<sup>77</sup> See, on this topic, Claudine Pailhès, “Les pays de l’Ariège et l’autorité sous l’Ancien régime”, *Bulletin de la Société ariégeoise des Sciences, Lettres et Arts*, 46 (1991), pp. 5-59, as well as Alan Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters: The Army and French Society during the Revolution and Empire*, (New York/Oxford, 1989).

<sup>78</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17-8 and 2L97-22, procès contre Floissac, juillet-août 1793.

<sup>79</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L98-28, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Joseph Duthiers, ci-devant noble, pour provocation au rétablissement de la royauté et publication de fausses nouvelles, frimaire II.

<sup>80</sup> Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters*, pp. 179-80.

<sup>81</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L63, Tribunal révolutionnaire, procès contre Jean Faure, officier municipal de Rouffignac, pour opposition au recrutement et émeute, juin 1793; A.N. W420-955, Tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris, procès contre Pierre Lejeune, dit Ramonêt, laboureur, pour opposition au recrutement, nivôse II.



reportedly told them, before the *vendanges* began.<sup>82</sup> The frequency of indictments against those who would *empêcher le recrutement* with their words also indicates that the authorities were especially concerned about this particular crime. Just as with the injunctions against criticizing the *assignats* or convincing people not to pay their taxes, the authorities were most concerned with those who attacked the pillars of the new order, whether for political reasons or simply to cause trouble.

The authorities' concerns are understandable, for the type of statements which were aimed at discouraging *volontaires* were powerful indeed. Commonly, for example, young men were told that they were foolish to sign up, for they were being led to a "boucherie": to the slaughter. Two soldiers passing through the town of Agen in 1793 caused a stir when they told young volunteers "que les ennemis ne tirent que sur les habits bleus, et respectent les habits blancs,"<sup>83</sup> and Jean de Malet, a *ci-devant* seigneur from the region of Doussac, in the Dordogne, also focused on uniforms in his fearsome talk. "Les habits des volontaires ne leur serviraient pas de grand' chose," he said cruelly, "mais qu'au moins ils n'auraient pas froid, puis qu'on leur ferait brûler leurs habits sur le corps."<sup>84</sup> Joseph Duthiers, another *ci-devant* noble, said menacingly that when Republican soldiers were taken prisoner in the Vendée, "qu'on leur rasait la tête, qu'on leur mettait de l'eau forte par-dessus, en leur disant: 'foutue canaille, allez maintenant joindre les sans-culottes'; voilà comment on venge les républicains;" Duthiers was executed for this and other statements, on the public square in Agen at the height of the Terror.<sup>85</sup> Dominique Cassaigne père, a medical officer for the valley of Vic Bigorre in the Hautes-Pyrénées, made use of reason rather than frightful scenes in his attempt to discourage conscripts, arguing that the nobility and the clergy would soon be reinstated in their former positions, and when this happened, they would not want to be on the wrong side.<sup>86</sup> Although there is certainly a case to be made for a generation gap between the young volunteers and their more conservative elders, seditious words of this type had a good chance at hitting their intended mark.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-15, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Catherine Lavigne, femme du Pierre Dumas domestique, pour incitation aux volontaires de désertre, octobre 1793-frimaire II.

<sup>83</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17- 7 and 2L97-19, procès contre Meunier et Denave, août 1793.

<sup>84</sup> *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), procès contre Jean de Malet, ci-devant noble, pour conspiration et propos contre-révolutionnaires, brumaire II; vol. 1, pp.265-80.

<sup>85</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L98-28, procès contre Duthiers, frimaire II.

<sup>86</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Dominique Cassaigne père, officier de santé, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires, pluviôse II.

<sup>87</sup> Verbal conflicts which highlight a division between the younger and older members of the community will be dealt with further in chapter V.



Just as unpatriotic sentiment had been fuelled by the continued requisitioning of grain, so the repeated demands for soldiers began to wear the patience of the rural population. The organization of National Guards in the villages, and the initial calls for *volontaires*, were met with relative enthusiasm in the countryside, but the call for 300,000 men in February 1793 is often cited as a turning point of public opinion during the Revolution, and it was far from being the last of the levies. People in the countryside soon began grumbling about the number of men consumed by the war machine of the Republic, and their statements tended towards predictions of an even gloomier future. Jacques Murat, *dit* Lapeycherie, a middle-aged servant from the village of Atur (Dordogne), returned there often, despite his position in the local *chef-lieu* of Périgueux. On one such visit in 1794, an acquaintance by the name of Jean Borda asked him about the volunteers in Périgueux. Murat responded that “on faisait partir des enfants qui n’étaient pas en état de tirer un coup de fusil, qu’on ferait périr les trois quarts de la France et qu’on ne viendrait pas à bout des sept couronnes qui étaient contre elle.”<sup>88</sup> In another example, Pierre Puiffé, a notary who would be executed for his seditious words, painted an even more gruesome picture of the call-to-arms to a group of bystanders:

Voilà mes amis qu’on demande actuellement tous les jeunes gens de 18 à 25 ans. Vous savez bien que tous les seigneurs voulaient faire de grand repas, [et qu’] ils avaient de grands desserts; eh bien, on veut faire comme ça des garçons: on veut les manger en salade. Quand il n’y aura plus de garçons, on prendra sans doute après les hommes mariés...<sup>89</sup>

The institution of the Jourdan Law on conscription in messidor VII (June 1799) triggered a renewed bout of chatter on the topic. Marion Grenier, *dite* Cauredon, a woman of royalist sympathies living in the commune of the Mas-d’Azil in the Ariège, reported that “on ferait à présent une levée de 16-60 ans, et que tout le peuple devait se lever en masse.”<sup>90</sup> While such statements indicate how orally transmitted news can become distorted, they also reveal a rural population frustrated with the current regime and its priorities.

As the war continued, the discontented – from both the rural elite and the peasantry itself – used popular uncertainty about the outcome of the conflict as a platform

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<sup>88</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L39, Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire, procès contre Jacques Murat, *dit* Lapeycherie, domestique, pour propos royalistes, décembre 1793-nivôse II, witness no. 3.

<sup>89</sup> A.N. W389-903, Tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris, and *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), vol. 1, pp.321-2, procès contre Pierre Puiffé, notaire, pour propos fanatiques et contre-révolutionnaires, nivôse-pluviôse II.

<sup>90</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U22, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Marion Grenier, *dite* Cauredon, journalière, pour propos royalistes et contre-révolutionnaires, fructidor VII - vendémiaire VIII.



from which to express royalist opinion. Spreading what sometimes turned out to be false news about the Republic's setbacks, the speakers in these cases led their listeners to the conclusion that "cela ne durerait pas toujours", and that the unfortunate experiment in republicanism would soon be over. Lamartigne, the notary from Cancon, announced "que la république était foutue, que 15,000 hommes bien déterminés remettraient le roy sur le trône."<sup>91</sup> Paul Larroze, a malcontent from the mountain village of Ercé, in the Ariège, reportedly went from house to house, to "sonder l'opinion publique", saying such things as that "la Vendée était autant insurgée que jamais", and that the end was not far off: "la République n'existerait pas longtemps, qu'il ne fallait qu'une étincelle pour opérer la contre-révolution...".<sup>92</sup> Making use of a romantic figure of popular renown, Larroze also reported that Pichegru, the peasant-turned-commander-turned-royalist, "allait commander une armée de 40,000 à Marseille." At other times, speakers brought the key events to their listeners' back doors. Pierre Grelety, an *ex-religieux* attempting to make a living as a teacher, was eating in a cabaret in Bergerac and discussing "les affaires de la Révolution" with the men in the room, when a local miller said, "Je voudrais bien que nous eussions la paix," to which Grelety replied, "Nous l'aurions bientôt, car il y a un rassemblement de 15,000 hommes cachés à Bordeaux; il y a déjà un roi nommé et du 20 au 25 du mois d'août il serait placé sur le trône à Lyon."<sup>93</sup>

Such statements are clearly interesting from the standpoint of the formation of rural political opinion, but in terms of news about the actual state of the war, it seems that the countryside was woefully uninformed.<sup>94</sup> One youth from the Pyrenean *bourg* of Lézat was involved in a 'counter-revolutionary *farandole*' in which the line, "long live the army of the Vendée" was heard, referring to the army of counter-revolutionary insurgents in the West of France. He admitted that "il ne savait pas de quelle armée on voulait parler, et que sans doute c'était de la nôtre."<sup>95</sup> Local reactions to rumours, of impossibly massive armies about to crush Paris or to invade from Spain, said more about peasants' desire for peace at any cost than their knowledge of their enemies' military strength. Such inaccuracies suggest that perhaps in some cases, the authorities' concerns that official information was

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<sup>91</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-9, procès contre Lamartigne, germinal II.

<sup>92</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U31, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Paul Larroze, cultivateur, pour propos contre le gouvernement, vendémiaire VI - brumaire X.

<sup>93</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L57-489, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Pierre Grelety se disant instituteur, pour propos royalistes, fructidor VII.

<sup>94</sup> The relative truth or falseness of popular statements about the course of the war will be dealt with in chapter V.

<sup>95</sup> A.D. Ariège 14L14-1, procès contre Peyronnel et d'autres, interrogation de Jean-Jacques Villa aîné, cordonnier, habitant de Lézat, 18 ventôse IV.



not arriving in the villages were correct. Whether the news was true or fanciful, however, peasant listeners had no difficulty in forming opinions about the political regime and its policies.

### Political ideas

Thus far, the themes we have examined – religion, the price of grain, taxation, and recruitment for the armies – are all traditional issues of concern to peasants, making their presence in the sample unsurprising. The character of the comments and ideas recorded in the archives of seditious speech and surveyed in the preceding pages is certainly more intelligent and politicised than might have been expected: in place of predictable gripes, the majority of comments contained a direct and scathing criticism of government policy, with very few limited to a recounting of problems. In fact, outright discussion of politics is the single most common theme to arise from the sample of indictments of seditious speech. Some of the themes examined, such as the dissuasion of volunteers and the false reports of failures of the Republican armies, were seen by the authorities, and may well have been concerted attempts to increase support for the royalist cause. Not only was politicised chatter common in the marketplace, along the roads, and on the village square, but peasants expressed themselves in political terms far more often than has been realised by historians.

Before we consider rural plans for the ideal government, however, let us begin at the village level, for some expressions of political sentiment were aimed more directly at local officials than they were at any abstract political conception of government. One could argue that these cases show very little of the political: after all, people tended to have an opinion of the personal effectiveness of those in charge, whether they cared about the form of government or not, and expressions of those animosities and differences were often taken as seditious speech by departmental authorities. Moreover, civil disobedience and defiance of municipal authority were punishable crimes in themselves. The parish priest, for example, often came up against the new order, not only because of its dechristianizing aspects, but also because, as the village *curé*, he represented an alternate centre of power to that of the municipal officers. In the bourg of Sorges in the Dordogne, the members of the municipal council denounced their parish priest, Pierre-Elie Lasescuras, in a rancorous, highly embellished *procès-verbal*. Lasescuras, they said, “cache sous le masque du patriotisme le venin de l’aristocratie la plus dangereuse”, using all the underhand means available to him to “déterminer le peuple à se monter contre la municipalité.” However, the



image that emerged from the depositions of no fewer than 42 witnesses was that of a desperate attempt on the part of local power-holders to maintain control in a tumultuous period.<sup>96</sup> In another trial in Calviac, also in the Dordogne, the municipality brought a case of “propos séditieux et incendiaires” against their priest, Pierre Thoury.<sup>97</sup> A careful examination of all the documents in the *dossier*, however, reveals Thoury to have been an advocate of the poorer peasantry, a stance which set him against a municipal council composed of the richer landowners and the members of the rural bourgeoisie.

Most often, such local infighting was dismissed by the investigating authorities on the grounds that it did not threaten the *sûreté* of the Republic. It is interesting to note, however, that in many cases, the documents reveal how old animosities came to be expressed in more politicised terms. The image of “old wine” being poured into “new bottles” is certainly appropriate here; but although it could be shown that some local conflicts went back long before 1789, the fresh confrontation between two parties over a new issue was often a politicizing factor in itself. Rich *coqs du village*, long resented by the poorer peasantry, became the “brigands” and “scélérats” who had benefited from the sale of *biens nationaux*,<sup>98</sup> and the local killjoy who had always voiced contrary opinions in public discussions was now referred to as an “aristocrat”. The butcher of the village of Gestières, in the Ariège, a certain Jean-Baptiste Rivière, attested that the current investigation of the troubles between a certain number of local “séditieux” and the municipal officers had arisen from “des troubles et des discordes entre les deux parties, d’aristocratie et [de] démocratie, qui ont toujours régné au dit lieu de Gestières...”.<sup>99</sup> In another case, in the hamlet of Sargeat in the Dordogne, a 55-year-old *cultivateur* named Jean Laugénie, protesting against the removal of the church bell-clapper, publicly declaimed against the members of the municipal council – “ce sont tous des aristocrates” – and divulged that an important decree had been hidden by the municipality, as they wanted [to] “s’attribuer les dîmes et les rentes comme les ci-devant nobles.”<sup>100</sup> Whether or not the person being called an “aristocrat” would have been called a “foutu gueux” several years earlier, such name-calling indicates, at the very least, a trickling down of new concepts of allegiances and political standpoints: concepts which would be better

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<sup>96</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L63, procès contre Lasescuras, brumaire II.

<sup>97</sup> A.D. Dordogne, B1604, Sénéchaussée de Sarlat, procès contre Pierre Thoury, prêtre de Calviac, pour avoir tenu des propos séditieux et incendiaires, ce qui aurait poussé ses paroissiens au trouble et au mépris des lois, septembre 1790.

<sup>98</sup> See, for example, A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L237-109, procès contre Peyriague, thermidor V.

<sup>99</sup> A.D. Ariège 8L33-9, procès contre Mathe et d’autres, avril 1793.

<sup>100</sup> A.D. Dordogne 24L44, procès contre Laugénie, floréal III.



understood with each passing year.

With time, the subject itself of political discussions shifted from local individuals to more distant and more abstract concepts, such as the national assemblies or Republicanism in general. Although any attempt at quantification must be undertaken with care, the cases nevertheless show an overall broadening of the political horizons of the peasantry by the end of the Revolution. In a first category, we find rural citizens arrested for counter-revolutionary shouts and assorted irreverent remarks. Broadly speaking, these exclamations tended either to insult the revolutionary regime, as in “merde à la loi” and “à bas la République”, or to express royalist sentiment. By far the most common of the latter variety was the ubiquitous remark, “vive le roi”, and would-be poets delighted in the discovery that it rhymed nicely with “ça n’ira pas”, a play on the well-known revolutionary anthem.<sup>101</sup> In some instances, comments decrying the Republican government could invoke unexpected names. An unresolved case from the Hautes-Pyrénées involved Jeannet Begarrie, a poor female day-labourer, who reportedly walked about the village of Argelès one night in the summer of 1799 shouting “vive l’intendant de Pau” as well as the more common “merde pour la nation, merde pour la République”.<sup>102</sup> Royalist sentiment was also expressed creatively, in wishes of good health referring to specific kings, alive, dead, or – depending on the level of intoxication of the shouter – imaginary. Thus, from a *farandole* of young people who ran about the town of Tarascon in 1797, singing and shouting and generally wreaking verbal havoc on the ears of the populace, were heard the following assorted remarks:

...vive le roi, vive Louis dix et huit; vive Henri quatre, vive ce roi vaillant; vive le roi d’Ussat, vive le Roi d’Orudlac, vive le roi Layrole. Vive les bons enfants; à bas les terroristes. À bas la République, foutre!<sup>103</sup>

Although the youths were “reconnus être dans le vin”, the authorities maintained that such a demonstration amounted to nothing less than a “provocation au rétablissement de la royauté”, and interrogated a total of 79 witnesses in the attempt, ultimately foiled by the intervention of a locally-elected jury, to bring the criminals to justice.<sup>104</sup>

The degree to which such vociferations can be taken as an indication of carefully

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<sup>101</sup> See, for example, the case of Aynie: A.D. Ariège, 8L33-1, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Joseph Aynie et d’autres pour propos et chants contre-révolutionnaires, février 1793.

<sup>102</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée (1791-an III), Tribunal du district de l’Adour, procès contre Jeannet Begarrie, journalière, pour avoir crié ‘vive le roi’, fructidor VII.

<sup>103</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Jeannet Vidalot et d’autres, jeunes artisans, pour cris séditieux, messidor V-brumaire VI.

<sup>104</sup> The question of juries will be dealt with in chapter IV.



considered political opinion, royalist or otherwise, is debatable. Where the remarks were the result of drunkenness, local malcontents were often let off because their statements were not made “méchamment” or “à dessein criminel”. From one perspective, these would seem to be instances in which words would be least likely to influence rural public opinion. One could also argue, however, that they helped to create an atmosphere in which the word of the government was not necessarily the final one. Although individuals in a drunken state might say things they do not mean, it is equally possible for alcohol to loosen tongues and lead individuals to momentarily forget their fear of the scaffold. Moreover, some cases clearly indicate that to contemporary listeners, expressions of fidelity, to one side or another, were an accurate way of gauging the political climate. Benoit Lamarque, a young apprentice-tailor living in the town of Saverdun, in the Ariège, was arrested for shouting aloud, “vive Louis dix-sept,” a common enough charge.<sup>105</sup> However, in a time when “le roi est mort, vive le roi” was the standard formula for announcing the death of one king and the accession of the next, such a statement might well be taken to signify a wish for the death of one regime and the succession of the next.

At the same time, one’s political opinion during the Revolution, as indeed at any time, would have hinged upon an evaluation of how the changes brought since 1789 had affected one’s personal situation. Whereas sometimes, seditious words were spoken with the intention of convincing listeners of a given point of view, at other times, the speaker was motivated primarily by his or her own dissatisfaction with the new order. Certain social groups, for example, had clearly suffered, and therefore had good reason to hold counter-revolutionary opinions; many of the parish priests we met earlier, as well as Malet, Duthiers, and other *ci-devants*, were quite clearly motivated by their own personal circumstances to speak out. Undoubtedly, even members of the unprivileged orders had sometimes lost more than they had gained under the Revolution. Lamartigne, the notary from Cancon whom we met early, had bitterly remarked, as a republican official drove past in style, that a deputy should not have a luxurious four-horse carriage when an *honnête homme* like himself had been forced to give up his one horse to the requisitions.<sup>106</sup> The case of Jean Casse, *dit* Lartigue, a 40-year-old *agriculteur* who was arrested for making counter-revolutionary statements at the inn in the nearby town, provides another good example. It appears that Lartigue was drowning his sorrows in his wine, for he was heard to say that the *représentants du peuple* were thieves, for those who served the Republic

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<sup>105</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-14, procès contre Lamarque, septembre 1793.

<sup>106</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-9, procès contre Lamartigne, germinal II.



had become richer, whilst he had been ruined. The eleven witnesses interrogated all recognised that Jean had taken rather too much wine; one of the cooks, Janon Dupeyrou, said that he was so drunk that he was falling over. More importantly, however, they said that he was upset because several of his mules had been requisitioned by the Republic, and so they had not paid too much attention to his political views.<sup>107</sup>

A third category of political statements encompasses those counter-revolutionary or royalist remarks which were made with a certain degree of hope that the future might yet see a return to the pre-revolutionary order. Often such remarks are wistful, as with the young man Bernard Lafont, arrested near Mirepoix for seditious activity, who had been heard to say that “si nous avions un roi les choses iraient mieux.”<sup>108</sup> In other instances, however, the speaker’s intention seems to have been to undermine confidence in the Revolution and discourage its supporters, by establishing an underlying sense that the republican government was only temporary. As early as 1791, in the village of Terrasse in the Haute-Garonne, the sieur Court, *dit* Parisien, was bragging at the wigmaker’s that

...depuis trois ans le roi n’était rien et ne faisait plus rien, mais qu’il y avait cinq couronnes étrangères qui devaient se réunir pour remettre le roi sur le trône, et qu’ils seraient secondés dans cette entreprise par le clergé et les nobles et beaucoup de domestiques et de gens soldés.<sup>109</sup>

Verge, *dit* Perot, a weaver from Ax-les-Thermes in the Ariège, concluded eight years later that “il ne fallait plus être terroriste, qu’il fallait se changer, et se ranger du parti contre-révolutionnaire et royaliste.”<sup>110</sup> Comments such as “cela ne durera pas”, and “nous aurions bientôt un roi” were quite common, and, when the defendants were convicted of their crime, almost certainly denoted a strong vein of royalist opinion. The mayor of the commune of Monbalen, in the Lot-et-Garonne, was sentenced to forced reclusion in 1794 for angrily stating that “il ne voulait pas être patriote; qu’un jour viendrait où les aristocrates baigneraient leurs mains dans le sang des patriotes... que si les anglais, le clergé et la ci-devant noblesse avaient le dessus, ils nous passeraient tous au fil de l’épée...”<sup>111</sup> Although it could be argued that often, the determination of government

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<sup>107</sup> A.D. Ariège, 13L24-8, Tribunal correctionnel du district de Tarascon, procès contre Jean Casse, *dit* Lartigue, agriculteur, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires, prairial IV.

<sup>108</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L35-2, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Bernard Lafont et d’autres, jeunes, pour cris de “vive Louis XVIII”, juillet 1793.

<sup>109</sup> A.N. D XXIX 6 (59), Comité des Rapports, procès contre Noël Frié *fils*, sellier, le Sr Court, *dit* Parisien, et d’autres, pour propos incendiaires contre la Constitution du royaume et notamment contre le décret... du 27 novembre dernier..., février 1791; see esp. witness no. 29.

<sup>110</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L70-5, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Pierre Verge, *dit* Perot, tisserand, pour cris séditieux, fructidor VII.

<sup>111</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne 2L98 and 2L105, procès contre Jean et Guillaume Marabal, nivôse-pluviôse II.



officials to root out sedition in the countryside was over-zealous, unnecessary and likely mistaken, there were clearly certain cases where their actions were quite justified.

The fourth and final category of political statements involves cases in which the speaker enunciated an intelligent and thoughtful appraisal of government and politics in the abstract sense, and is therefore the most interesting for its significance to the development of rural public opinion. In such statements, the Republic was sometimes seen as inefficient, and speakers used classic arguments against the drawbacks of democracy. Duthiers, the embittered *ci-devant* noble from whom we have heard before, argued,

...qu'on avait eu tort de faire mourir le roi; que les affaires iraient mieux [si on avait un roi], que la France était trop grande, qu'avec un seul maître nous serions mieux conduits, qu'un grand nombre n'était jamais d'accord, qu'à la Convention les uns voulaient une chose, les autres une autre...<sup>112</sup>

While Duthiers was clearly better educated than the average peasant, similar observations are not uncommon among the villagers of the south-west. The words of Thomas Bordas, the weaver from Segonzac whom we met earlier, will illustrate my point.<sup>113</sup> Interrupting a monotonous civic ceremony in February 1796, Bordas stepped forward and said that such pageants meant nothing except to the municipal officers. What they should do, he continued, was simply ask everyone present who wanted the Republic, and who, a king, and then they would know where the majority lay. According to the information provided by the witnesses, other villagers had agreed to make the statement with Bordas, only to lose their nerve at the last moment. Although the members of the government of the Directory would have thought that Bordas' grasp of electoral procedure left much to be desired, he went on to demonstrate that he understood the significance of each form of government, and that he had a firm preference for one over the other. Clearly, the political conversations recorded during the Revolution do not demonstrate an expert knowledge of abstract political concepts. What they do show, however, is that peasants were interested in, and had opinions on, matters of political concern. Such statements represent more than the traditional *murmures* of a dissatisfied peasantry: they reveal a basic understanding of political designations, and, more importantly, the desire to express an opinion on the matter.

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<sup>112</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L98-28, procès contre Duthiers, frimaire II.

<sup>113</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L45-260, procès contre Bordas, pluviôse IV.



## Varieties of Words and Forms of Communication

Thus, the seditious remarks recorded by revolutionary authorities reveal that political statements made in a rural context touched upon a variety of topics, from what might be considered "traditional" peasant concerns to discussions of methods of governing. To this point, however, the statements have been considered in relative isolation from the context and manner in which they were said, and yet there were many different varieties of rural political expression. Some of the prosecuted statements, as we have seen above in the examination of ideas which were expressly political, were no more than brief drunken outbursts. Others, particularly those voiced by intermediary figures such as parish priests and notaries, could be lengthy expositions, skilfully crafted with the aim of changing opinions and winning converts. Still others were not spoken at all: political songs, visual symbols and handwritten placards all played an important role in the spread of ideas. It is to this final category of political expression that we now turn our attention, completing the complex mosaic of political communication in the countryside.

### Songs as political communication

The incidence of singing, and seditious or counter-revolutionary singing in particular, is extremely high in the judicial archives of the Revolution, and has perhaps not received its due attention from historians. As modern-day publicists take advantage of radio, television and electronic media to reach ever-larger audiences, songs in the eighteenth century were a highly effective means of communicating political views.<sup>114</sup> For the most part, they were heard by more people, for while it is true that a speaker could stand on a bench to address a larger group, most seditious statements in rural surroundings were made to only a few people. In the case against a young medical officer, accused of seditious comments in the commune of Nadaillac, in the Dordogne, one witness testified that while he could not be sure whether anybody else had heard the statements he had reported, "plusieurs doivent lui avoir entendu chanter des chansons qui furent jugées aristocratiques."<sup>115</sup> In another example, in which a gathering of young people was judged by the authorities to be counter-revolutionary in intent, a total of seventy-nine witnesses were interrogated, on the assumption that many villagers must have heard the singing from

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<sup>114</sup> See Cornwall Rogers, *The Spirit of 1789: A Study of Public Opinion as Revealed in Political Songs and Other Popular Literature at the Beginning of the French Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 1949), pp. 17-8.

<sup>115</sup> A.D. Dordogne 24L39, Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire, procès contre Louis Schlafer, officier de santé, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires; witness no. 3, Pierre Teyssieux, cultivateur, déposition 14 nivôse II.



wherever they had been at the time; indeed, most of them had.<sup>116</sup> Finally, songs were a very important part of communication in non-literate cultures. Jean-François Soulet has suggested that it is not surprising to find songs in “la panoplie subversive du Pyrénéen”, for they were accessible to everyone:

...la chanson fournissait concrètement à tous, surtout aux plus humbles, les concepts abstraits et les mots qu'ils avaient à formuler. Chacun pouvait facilement, en fredonnant «Le marquis de Carabas», marquer son hostilité à la noblesse, et en chantant un couplet de «La Carmagnole» affirmer ses opinions républicaines.<sup>117</sup>

Similarly, Laura Mason has argued that songs were “one of the most commonly used means of communication of the French Revolution... [allowing] anyone to commit news and controversial opinions to memory and relay them across city or countryside, outpacing printing presses and police alike.”<sup>118</sup> Mason's study is concerned primarily with Paris, but dozens of court cases brought against rural citizens accused of counter-revolutionary singing confirm that her argument is also relevant to rural society.<sup>119</sup>

A number of factors made songs a very effective means of communicating political opinions and allegiances. In a similar way to the shouts and irreverent remarks discussed above, the expression of a political stance through a song was more spontaneous, and therefore less potentially incriminating, than a statement expressed in a cerebral, persuasive manner. Due to the social nature of the activity, a disproportionate number of those accused of counter-revolutionary singing was acquitted on claims to of having been drunk at the time, and the idea that one might sing simply for amusement, rather than with a political aim, was a commonly-voiced defence. “Ce n'était que pour égayer la société”, protested one defendant accused of singing counter-revolutionary songs; another, the nineteen-year-old *cultivateur* Henri Lagonde, claimed that, in singing a known royalist song, “son intention n'était point de fâcher personne, encore moins d'ameuter le peuple; [il a] fredonné le dit air, comme il aurait fredonné tout autre.”<sup>120</sup> Compared with blatantly seditious comments, singing was more excusable, and thus, perhaps a better means of communication. In the case of Rouge, *dit* Coussa, in which there

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<sup>116</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d'autres, messidor V-brumaire VI.

<sup>117</sup> Soulet, *Les Pyrénées*, p. 235.

<sup>118</sup> Laura Mason, *Singing the French Revolution: Popular Culture and Politics, 1787-1799* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>119</sup> On the importance of songs in popular politics, see also Darnton, “An Early Information Society”; Francisque Mège, *Chansons politiques et satiriques en Auvergne pendant la période révolutionnaire* (Clermont-Ferrand, 1888); Bianchi, *Révolution culturelle*, pp. 178-81; and Roger Dupuy, “Ignorance, fanatisme et Contre-Révolution”, in François Lebrun and Roger Dupuy (eds.), *Les Résistances à la Révolution* (Paris, 1987), pp. 37-42.

<sup>120</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L237-115, Tribunal correctionnel de Nérac, procès contre Henri Lagonde, cultivateur, et sa tante la veuve Lamothe, pour des chansons inciviques, thermidor V.



was a vague accusation of seditious singing and shouts, all fifty-eight witnesses stood together to protect the accused: they heard some songs, most said, but no shouts of 'vive le roi'.<sup>121</sup>

Political songs were used to express a wide variety of ideas and opinions, revealing the flexibility and uniqueness of this means of communication. A certain proportion of incidents of counter-revolutionary singing involved easily recognizable, established anthems. The *Réveil du peuple*, for example, which had become known during the White Terror in eastern and south-eastern France, remained the rallying cry for the royalist cause throughout the Directory:

Peuple français, peuple de frères,  
Peux-tu voir sans frémir d'horreur  
Le crime arborer les bannières  
Du carnage et de la terreur?  
Tu souffres qu'une horde atroce  
Et d'assassins, et de brigands,  
Souille par son souffle féroce  
Le territoire des vivants...<sup>122</sup>

Although the *Réveil* has been described as principally effective for winning over the illiterate masses of Paris,<sup>123</sup> it is clear, from the many indictments for seditious singing in this sample, that the song was readily recognised and understood in the south-western countryside. In one report of counter-revolutionary singing in the Dordogne, the *agent municipal* describes the song as "un air martial appelé le réveil du peuple,"<sup>124</sup> and in several cases, the majority of witnesses were able to identify the song which they had heard as the *Réveil*.<sup>125</sup>

Other instances of seditious singing reveal the commonplace nature of the incorporation of politics and opinion into songs. Very often, for example, the "song" in question was no more than vaguely counter-revolutionary lyrics sung to an inoffensive, well-known tune; the line between actual "singing" and putting seditious statements to

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<sup>121</sup> A.D. Ariège, 14L43-12, Tribunal correctionnel de Pamiers, procès contre Michel Rouge, *dit* Coussa, pour rassemblement et cris séditieux, frimaire V.

<sup>122</sup> *Réveil du peuple* (1795), verse 1. Text from "La Révolution française en chansons" [sound recording], Le Chant du Monde, LDX 274896; Produced in France by MPO, historical text by Pierre Barbier.

<sup>123</sup> See F.V.A. Aulard, "La Querelle de la «Marseillaise» et du «Réveil du peuple»", in *Études et leçons sur la Révolution française* (9 vols., Paris, 1893-1924), vol.3.

<sup>124</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 25L36, Tribunal correctionnel de Bergerac, procès contre Macerouze Birol et d'autres, volontaires, pour cris séditieux, prairial IV.

<sup>125</sup> See, for example, A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L236-76, Tribunal correctionnel, procès contre Antoine Pochet, tanneur, et d'autres, pour attroupement et chansons contre-révolutionnaires, thermidor IV; and A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L237-115, procès contre Lagonde et sa tante la veuve Lamothe, thermidor V.



music was thus a very fine one. There are numerous instances of individuals who “chantaient vive le roi”, or sang words which were “pas dans le sens de la Révolution” or “contre la République”.<sup>126</sup> Other times, there is a certain degree of playing on words and rhymes in establishing whether a song is or is not counter-revolutionary. In one case, a sailor named Duffour, who was passing through the town of Agen in 1794, was accused of singing, in an *auberge*, a song “dont le refrain était vive le roi”. When asked if he had, in fact, sung the offensive lyric, he denied it, insisting that he had sung one song which began, “nous n’avons donc plus de roi, et ne perdons rien ma foi”, followed by a second, with a chorus of “vive la nation, vive la loi, vive la loi mais point de roi.”<sup>127</sup>

However, perhaps the most interesting incidents of counter-revolutionary singing, and the most revelatory of a *prise de conscience politique*, are those cases in which the words of a patriotic song, such as the *La Carmagnole* or *Ça ira*, are replaced or turned about, to imply a counter-revolutionary meaning.<sup>128</sup> Jacques Lamartigne, the opinionated notary from Cancon from whom we have heard on several occasions, was also accused of singing a song which included the phrase, “moi je dis que ça n’ira pas”, or, according to other witnesses, “moi je dis à mon tour, ça n’ira pas toujours.”<sup>129</sup> One individual present in the tavern, the administrator Jean Bidon, pointed out that “chaque couplet de cette chanson était l’inverse des couplets patriotiques de la chanson ça ira”, and Pierre André, a 40-year-old horse-salesman who was also present, declared that when Lamartigne had sung, “et moi je dis à mon tour cela ne durera pas toujours”, he had understood “que l’accusé entendait parler de la Constitution et voulait faire entendre qu’elle ne durera pas toujours.” Such reversals of meaning were reasonably common among indictments for seditious singing, and clearly full of significance for listeners. Two years later, in the commune of Lalinde, in the Dordogne, a number of voices were heard singing to the tune of the Carmagnole. Many of the thirty-one witnesses interviewed, however, had been horrified when they realised that instead of singing the opening line as intended – “Madam’ Veto avait promis de faire égorger tout Paris” – the singers had replaced “Madam’ Veto”

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<sup>126</sup> See, for example, A.D. Dordogne, 24L46-279, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Gabriel Labouneille, perruquier, pour cris séditieux, floréal IV; A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-9, procès contre Lamartigne, germinal II; and A.D. Ariège, 2U28, Tribunal criminel de l’arrondissement de Pamiers, procès contre Jean-Louis Casaux, dit Labotte fils, agriculteur, et d’autres, pour propos anti-Républicains, messidor VII - messidor IX.

<sup>127</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-14, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Raimond Duffour, marin, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires, pluviôse II.

<sup>128</sup> Rogers also notes this phenomenon; *The Spirit of 1789*, p. 27.

<sup>129</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-9, procès contre Lamartigne, germinal II.



with “les terroristes”, making a powerful political statement.<sup>130</sup>

Songs were thus a significant means of communication of political opinion, particularly among the illiterate inhabitants of the countryside. Often in cases of seditious singing, moreover, it was not the songs themselves which caught the attention of the authorities, but rather, the seditious remarks which the songs had provoked. In 1794, for example, Charles Vivié, a 62-year-old *laboureur*, sang an unidentified “chanson royaliste” in a tavern, after which the singer and some of his listeners were prompted to say, “c’est vrai, nous ne serons pas tranquille que nous n’ayons un roi.”<sup>131</sup> In another instance, during what developed into a seditious gathering of young people, the singing of a song which began, “le triste départ qui se prépare...” prompted comments about the requisitions for the armies, including, from one bystander, “il ne faut pas partir sans contre dit.”<sup>132</sup>

Finally, the nature of singing, as a social, group-oriented activity, made it important as a mechanism for rallying bystanders to one political position or another. In many of the cases cited above, reference is made to the defendants’ attempts to persuade others to join in the singing, and the responses of these bystanders was taken as a clear indication of their political opinion. Where the individuals involved were firm in their opposing points of view, the singing of songs clearly became contentious, with each side challenging the other to a political contest. Sclafer, a young medical officer, had been at a country wedding, when “il entreprit même plusieurs fois de chanter à table des chansons aristocratiques, mais il fut toujours interrompu par l’hymne des Marseillais.”<sup>133</sup> In a much earlier example, in a social gathering of villagers in the Haute-Garonne, one young boy had sung, “vive le roi, vive le roi”, to be countered by the defendant, a recently dispossessed noble named Court, who sang a song “against the Constitution”, which had as a refrain, “vive Condé et d’Artois.”<sup>134</sup> Regardless of the political conflict at issue, songs clearly acted as an important conduit for the expression of opinion.

### Symbols and visual communication

In a similar way to counter-revolutionary singing, visual symbols allowed a more

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<sup>130</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 25L36, procès contre Birol et d’autres, prairial IV. Similarly, in the case against Vidalot and other young people in Tarascon, the defendants had reportedly sung “counter-revolutionary lyrics to the Carmagnole”; A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, messidor V-brumaire VI.

<sup>131</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L41, Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire, procès contre Charles Vivié, laboureur, pour propos royalistes, thermidor II.

<sup>132</sup> A.D. Ariège, 14L14-1, procès contre Peyronnel et d’autres, nivôse IV.

<sup>133</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L39, procès contre Sclafer, frimaire-nivôse II.

<sup>134</sup> A.N. D XXIX 6 (59), procès contre Frié fils, Court, dit Parisien, et d’autres, février 1791.



subtle indication of political allegiance. As Lynn Hunt has written, "politics were not confined to verbal expression"; the Revolution was packed with symbolism, from revolutionary bonnets to clothing, ceramic dishes, calendars and playing cards (see Figure 3-6, following page).<sup>135</sup> While the intricate political implications of slight changes in dress or imagery were probably lost on rural inhabitants, the significance of simpler forms of symbolism certainly permeated the countryside, and took their place among the means by which people expressed political opinions.

One of the symbolic elements which made the greatest impact in rural society was the liberty tree. Interestingly enough, it was in this very region, the south-west, and the Périgord and Quercy in particular, that villagers had planted May trees in 1789 and 1790 as a sign of revolt. The authorities soon appropriated the symbol, rebaptizing the *mais* as a patriotic symbol of liberty and support for the Revolution.<sup>136</sup> As the revolutionary decade progressed, however, the liberty trees which had been planted by municipal authorities in 1790 and 1791 came to be the target of anti-revolutionary sentiment.<sup>137</sup> Numerous cases exist in which the *arbre de la liberté* is defiled, vandalised, or even chopped down ("massacred", in revolutionary discourse). In some instances of seditious speech, such as the gathering of youths in Tarascon, described earlier, the voicing of counter-revolutionary sentiment near or around the tree seems to have been intended, by the culprits, as an added insult.<sup>138</sup> In one particularly colourful case, the objectionable remarks are actually addressed to the tree, as a symbol of the Revolution. One morning in December 1796, the municipal council of Lézat, in the Ariège, awoke to find that the liberty tree had been cut down. In the course of their investigation of the incident, they found that there had been a seditious *farandole* some weeks earlier, in which the young insurgents had been seen spitting at the tree, and addressing statements to it such as, "c'est un foutu arbre, il nous avait promis la liberté et il ne nous la donne pas", and "ah coquin, tu m'as trompé."<sup>139</sup> Unbelievable as such occurrences might seem, they were verified by a large number of

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<sup>135</sup> See Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*, esp. chapter 2, "Symbolic forms of political practice"; and Bianchi, *Révolution culturelle*.

<sup>136</sup> Mona Ozouf, "Du mai de liberté à l'arbre de la liberté: symbolisme révolutionnaire et tradition paysanne", *Ethnologie française*, 5 (1975), pp. 9-32; Michel Duval, "Les arbres de la liberté en Bretagne sous la Révolution (1792-1799)", in François Lebrun and Roger Dupuy (eds.), *Résistances à la Révolution*, actes du colloque de Rennes, 17-23 septembre 1985 (Paris, 1987), pp. 55-67; Vovelle, *Découverte de la politique*, pp. 44-55; Markoff, *Abolition of Feudalism*, pp. 418-9; and Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, p. 61.

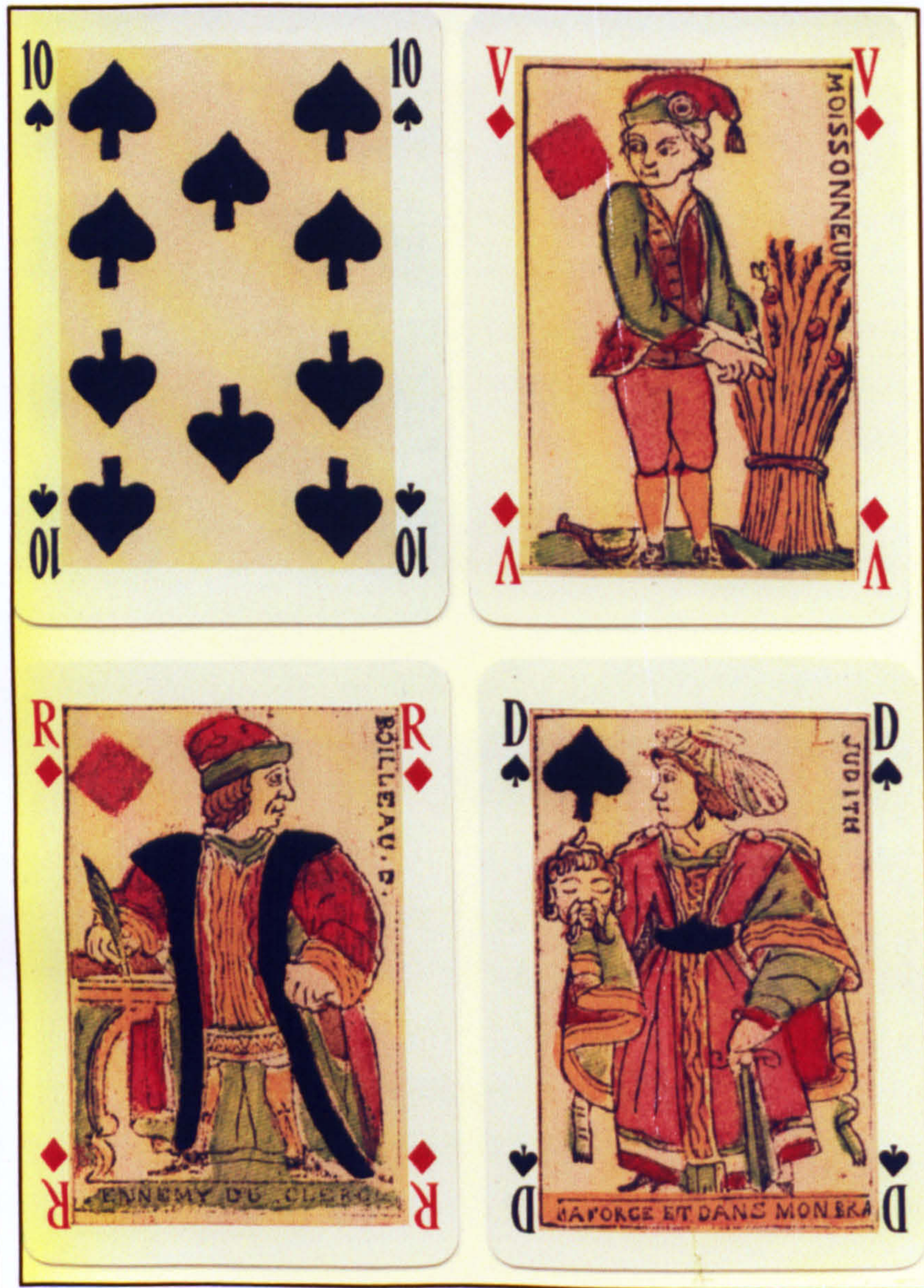
<sup>137</sup> The series D XXIXbis in the National Archives contains many reports of conflicts over liberty trees in the south-west and throughout France.

<sup>138</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d'autres, messidor V-brumaire VI.

<sup>139</sup> A.D. Ariège 14L14-1, procès contre Peyronnel et d'autres, nivôse IV.



Figure 3-6  
Revolutionary Playing Cards



Source: "Jeu de l'an II" (Reproduction, Éditions Dusserre); Musée Carnavalet, Paris.



witnesses, and they leave little doubt as to how the political meaning of the well-known symbol was understood.

The other object of visual communication which requires special mention is the revolutionary cockade.<sup>140</sup> First worn by deputies of the National Assembly in the summer of 1789, the significance of these small badges lay, first, in the decision to wear one, and second, in the colour of the cockade worn. The first of these two political acts did not take long to filter into rural consciousness: in September 1789, in the village of Razac d'Eymet, in the Dordogne, an argument over the leadership of the National Guard became political when one individual said of the troublemaker, "qu'il n'était pas fait pour porter la cocarde puisqu'il n'y avait que les honêtes gens qui la portassent."<sup>141</sup> In another encounter, at a fair in 1793 near St. Julien, also in the Dordogne, the young son of an innkeeper had asked some of the guests for a *cocarde*; the defendant, a *cultivateur* by the name of Lacombe, pinned one to his shirt, saying, "je te la mets bien, mais avant que trois ans se passent on les fera bien poser."<sup>142</sup>

As the Revolution wore on, however, the key issue in the wearing of cockades became their colour. While the later cockades were tricolours, like the flag – with white representing the monarchy, and red and blue the traditional colours of Paris – earlier cockades, and indeed, counter-revolutionary ones, were merely white. In one incident, in the Haute-Garonne, a group of men were gathered in a tavern, discussing "les affaires du temps", when one of the individuals present seized the hat of another man and attached a white paper cockade to it, saying, "c'est à cette cocarde que vous devez vous rallier." According to the other witnesses, his action had clearly been understood as an attempt to engage people to side with the counter-revolution.<sup>143</sup> Somewhat later, at a counter-revolutionary gathering near the field of the Boulbonne in the Ariège, the insurgents apparently "foulaient au pied la cocarde tricolore et arboraient la cocarde blanche aux cris séditieux de 'À bas la Nation'."<sup>144</sup> Evidently, the white cockade had become a rallying symbol for the royalist cause, as intelligible to rural inhabitants as to Parisian workers.

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<sup>140</sup> See Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, pp. 57-59, 60, 75, 81.

<sup>141</sup> A.D. Dordogne, B2054, Sénéchaussée de Bergerac, procès contre le sieur Benaud, curé, pour incitation à sédition, septembre 1789.

<sup>142</sup> A.N. W 438-25, Tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris; *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), vol. 1, pp. 317-8, procès contre Pierre Lacombe, cultivateur, pour propos tendant à l'anéantissement de la République, octobre 1793-fructidor II.

<sup>143</sup> A.N. D XXIX 6 (59), procès contre Frié fils, Court, dit Parisien, et d'autres, février 1791.

<sup>144</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L35-2, procès contre Layrix et d'autres, août-sept 1793.



## Written sedition

One final category of unspoken political communication – the posters and hand-written notices which local authorities sometimes found placarded on the pillars of the *maison commune* or the town walls after a fair – deserves a brief remark. Written sedition has been a somewhat popular topic among urban historians, particularly of England but also of France.<sup>145</sup> Accounts of sedition in rural areas rarely mention placards, however, and with good reason, for the great majority of peasants were, of course, illiterate. Indeed, the handful of cases of *écrits séditieux* – merely eight in total, or less than five percent of the sample of trials – are among the least “rural” of all the trials, for although a significant component of the audience in each case was from a rural environment, the alleged perpetrators and the context were decidedly urban. The placards ranged from quite complex, such as the notice recovered from the pillar separating the two church doors in the market town of Bussière-Badil (Dordogne), in 1791, pieced together from bits of newspaper, ostensibly by members of the National Guard (see Figure 3-7, next page), to quite simple, such as the following notice which was found in the market town of Nérac in nivôse VI:<sup>146</sup>

VIVE LE ROI  
VIVE LA NO BLESSE  
ET LE CLERGÉ  
PÉRISSE LA  
RÉPUBLIQUE  
À BAS LE DIRECTOIRE  
EXÉCUTIF

Thus the documents themselves are not without interest: indeed, the very existence of material evidence of sedition makes them refreshingly different from trials which attempt to follow the fleeting words of dissent. On the whole, however, they are in quite a different category from the oral news reports and seditious opinions we have studied this far.

Although the ideas and opinions set forth in writing were not the ideas and opinions of peasants, they do represent, like the words of the parish priests which we saw

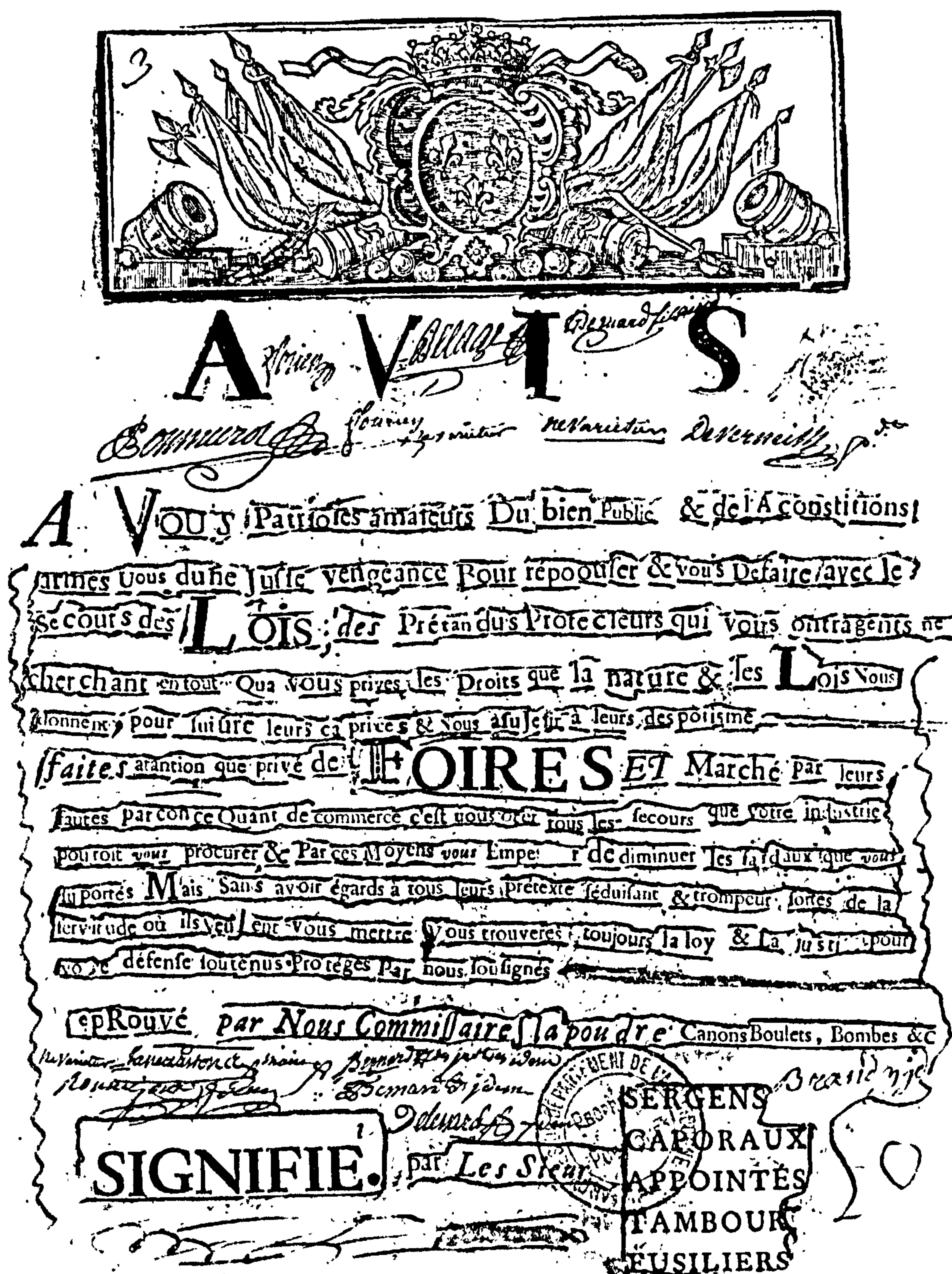
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<sup>145</sup> On England, see Fox, “Rumour”; Cust, “News and Politics”; and Atherton, “The Itch Grown a Disease”. On France, see Jeffrey Sawyer, *Printed Poison: Pamphlet Propaganda, Faction Politics, and the Public Sphere in Early Seventeenth-Century France* (Berkeley, CA, 1990), and Darnton, “An Early Information Society”.

<sup>146</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L239-176, Tribunal correctionnel de Nérac, procès contre les auteurs d’une affiche posée sous la halle de cette commune portant provocation à la Royauté, nivôse VI.



Figure 3-7  
Seditious Placard, Bussière-Badil (Dordogne), March 1791



Source: A.D. Dordogne, 19L75, District court of Nontron, Piece of evidence gathered in the investigation of "quidams accusés d'avoir affiché des placards et tenus des propos séditieux", 20 March 1791.



earlier, political ideas put forward in a rural context. As such, they would nevertheless have affected those rural bystanders whose presence guaranteed their inclusion in the sample of trials. Indeed, perhaps the greatest interest of these sources is that in spite of their presence in a largely oral culture, there was little or no problem with the diffusion of the information: literate townsmen simply read the notice aloud to anyone who cared to listen. In vendémiaire VI, for example, Jean Froidefon, a *cultivateur* living near the town of Terrasson, in the Dordogne, gave the following testimony regarding a printed notice that had been found posted all over the public square:

...il était en train de mesurer du blé sous la halle du présent chef-lieu, que quelqu'un avait affiché des placards jaunes pendant la nuit; que les citoyens en passant en faisaient lecture, et disaient que c'était un écrit contre le Directoire de la République.<sup>147</sup>

Although Froidefon was unable to sign his deposition, and thus – almost certainly – unable to have read the poster for himself, he nevertheless grasped the essential point of the message in the notice. The case of a seditious notice in the town of Pamiers (Ariège), on the eve of the Revolution itself, is similar: according to Jean Poumiès, a local saddler, the sieur Maury, innkeeper, was informing everyone he met that “on avait vu une affiche sur le pilier de la place, où l'on inculpait les officiers municipaux relativement à la vente des grains.”<sup>148</sup> By the time Poumiès arrived at the square, two youths were working at copying down the text, and a small crowd had gathered to hear what was contained within: the illiterate rural bystander in Pamiers would have had no difficulty learning what the writer of the seditious notice had meant to communicate. Indeed, if the few existing trials of written sedition in rural market towns demonstrate anything, it is the fact that oral communication was largely sufficient for life in the eighteenth-century French countryside.

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<sup>147</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 29L18, Tribunal correctionnelle de Sarlat, procès contre Bouillac Lachapelle, volontaire hussard, pour placards séditieux, fructidor V - brumaire VI, witness no. 1.

<sup>148</sup> A.D. Ariège, 1J305, procès-verbal de police au sujet d'un placard séditieux.



## IV.

### THE PROSECUTION OF SEDITIOUS SPEECH: SOME CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE USE OF JUDICIAL SOURCES

Despite the best efforts of the administrative machine of the Revolution, it is patently clear that the channels used to disseminate the official line – circulation of laws and decrees, announcements read by municipal officers, sponsored newspapers and physical manifestations of the regime such as the national guard and political societies – were not the only source of political information available to the peasantry. As shown in chapter III, members of each of the different groups populating the countryside, from the rural elite to humble artisans and peasants, shared information and conversed about a wide range of political topics. The statements examined move beyond what might be considered “traditional” realms of peasant discourse – complaints about grain prices, taxation and recruitment – to an open criticism of government policy, and to conclusions on the new political regime based on that policy. The judicial and police documents which recount these various discussions are rich for what they can tell us about the development of rural public opinion: in addition to identifying the speaker and giving the context of the words spoken, including information on the composition of the speaker’s audience, such sources most often give details of the reactions of both rural bystanders and local authorities, reactions which will be examined in chapter V. In addition, most documents indicate a venue of political discussion, and the same location – marketplaces, inns and cabarets, roadways and village squares – are repeatedly cited, allowing us to confirm the picture painted in chapter I of a countryside full of crossroads and places of meeting, and of a vivacious oral tradition which was alive and well at the time of the French Revolution.

Moreover, these sources also tell us a great deal about the conditions of their creation, and about the specific preoccupations of the revolutionary authorities. Indeed, police and judicial documents must be used with particular care, for they often bear a



strong bias from their authors. In the introduction to their book, *History from Crime*, editors Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero reflect upon the complexity of judicial sources:

Criminal records can never be simple windows into the past; rather, they are highly crafted images fashioned in accord with legal procedures, statutes, precedents, and the cultural and power dynamics of the past. [...] Everyone who speaks during a criminal procedure does so under the constraints of authority, which means that all speech has been conditioned by threats of punishment, the fear of torture, the influence of well-connected persons, and the need of the regime to make criminal sentences exemplary. Historians have long recognized that court cases generate evidence that has been polluted by authority. One response favored in recent years has been to treat criminal records as dialogues in which as much attention is paid to questions asked as answers given...<sup>1</sup>

It would be foolhardy to accept judicial sources from the revolutionary era – and particularly from the period of the reign of Terror – at face value, and yet they offer us such an unparalleled access to the political thoughts of ordinary countrymen and women that we cannot ignore them. In order to take some of their particularities into account, therefore, it is necessary to consider them from the perspective of their authors, and it is from this perspective that this chapter is written.

As we saw in chapter II, the deputies of the revolutionary governments took the dissemination of official information seriously: it was their sincere conviction that the population needed government communiqués to fulfil their duty as citizens of the Republic, and that nothing good could come of their being deprived of it. In the case against the peasant Jean Bernard, *dit* Biotte, who was accused of removing official notices from the church door, the *comité révolutionnaire* who forwarded the initial report pointed out that “l’enlèvement des placards des lois affichées est un crime, et que sa [Biotte’s] conduite à cet égard ne tend qu’à priver ses concitoyens de la connaissance des lois, et du fruit qui doit en résulter pour le bien de la chose publique.”<sup>2</sup> In addition, officials were concerned that the spread of what they considered “incorrect” information – unofficial news reports, ideas and opinions which ran contrary to the official line – could “corrupt” and “lead astray” otherwise upstanding citizens. In their struggle to maintain control over public opinion, the government, in tandem with the political societies, flooded the countryside with Republican propaganda, and reached far into the provinces with the “arms of the revolutionary machine” – including local administrators, police officials, and deputies travelling as civic missionaries or *représentants-en-mission* – in order to monitor and enforce correct political thinking.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (eds.), *History from Crime* (Baltimore/ London, 1994), p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L42, procès contre Bernard, *dit* Biotte, Extrait des délibérations du comité révolutionnaire de Ribérac, 10 pluviôse II.



In spite of these “preventative” measures of reinforcing the political message of the Revolution and verifying its proper application in the countryside, revolutionary officials were keenly aware that unacceptable views and information were circulating, and they worked hard to eliminate them. The periodical press was carefully monitored, and publishers were required not only to register with the authorities, but also to print both their name and address on every issue.<sup>3</sup> Oral sedition was more difficult to control, but officials at both the national and local level worked to discover its source. The municipal officers of Les Angles, for example, in the Hautes-Pyrénées, received an order from the departmental administration in 1794 informing them of a search to “découvrir les auteurs des bruits contre-révolutionnaires que la France n’a plus besoin de faire la guerre aux tyrans de l’Europe.”<sup>4</sup> Whether the culprits in such cases were discovered or not, many deputies thought it prudent to disseminate pro-revolutionary information to counteract the possible effect of the false news. In January 1793, Thuriot suggested that the *Comité d’instruction publique* should draft “un projet d’adresse au peuple pour le garantir des mauvais effets que pourraient produire les écrits séditieux qui se sont répandus dans les circonstances actuelles.”<sup>5</sup> Six months later, another address was planned, in order to clearly enunciate the government’s position on the events of 31 May 1793, and thus, to prevent any rumours from gaining credibility.<sup>6</sup> However, it was the attempts of local authorities to discover and punish those who dared to express a counter-revolutionary opinion in public which reveal the most about how legislators interpreted the enunciation of political opinions by inhabitants of the countryside, and where, in the official view, the peasantry fit into the political sphere.

In this chapter, we will consciously turn away from the attempt to view history “from below”, and examine how and with what specific goals the authorities attempted to control the communication of political ideas and opinions which went against the official line. We will begin with a brief look at two key antecedents from the early modern period: first, the prosecution of heretical speech in Western Europe in the late middle ages, and

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<sup>3</sup> For one example, see A.D. Dordogne, 1L396 (Police, surveillance de presse); A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 1L162, Police générale, esp., Arrêté du directoire exécutif prohibant le transport des lettres, journaux et autres ouvrages périodiques par toute autre voie que par l’administration générale des postes, 4 pluviôse VI.

<sup>4</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, Edep Les Angles, 1D2, Délibérations du conseil municipal, 1791-1824; Arrêté de l’administration du département, 2<sup>e</sup> sans-culottide, II.

<sup>5</sup> A.P. vol.37, p.37, 13 janvier 1793.

<sup>6</sup> A.P. vol.65, pp. 676ff, 1<sup>er</sup> juin 1793. See too the copy of the circular at B.M. Périgueux, LR VII 26 (Lapeyre, carton 52), “Adresse aux habitants des campagnes”, de Paré, Ministre de l’Intérieur, 2 brumaire II.



second, the prosecution of treason and seditious speech in seventeenth-century England. Returning to France, we will look first at the official position on sedition and treason prior to 1789, before examining the evolution of this position during the French Revolution. In a final section, we will move from legislative theory to the practice of local trials, where investigators' preoccupations and the verdicts decided by both judge and jury reveal how the incidents were perceived to have threatened the attachment of the rural population to the Revolution. The fifth and final chapter, which follows, will build upon these conclusions, and analyse to what extent the authorities' concerns were justified, by examining peasant reaction to the variety of political opinions.

### Historical Antecedents for the Prosecution of Disruptive Speech

The repression of words which were perceived to threaten the established order is, of course, far from being an invention of the French Revolution. The censorship of the written word, perceived as more dangerous for its tangible permanence but easier to police, has existed to some extent in virtually all literate societies. From the lists of forbidden books compiled by the Catholic Church to the tight control wielded by the Sorbonne over French printers in the *ancien régime*, ecclesiastical and secular institutions in early modern Europe worked to restrict the circulation of the wrong kind of information, hindering printers, writers, pedlars and readers alike.<sup>7</sup> However, what primarily interests us here is the censorship of *spoken* words: more fleeting and more difficult to control, but equally dangerous to public order. While historians of printed dissent have the texts themselves as sources, our knowledge of words spoken against the authorities, whether ecclesiastical or secular, is limited to the evidence of their prosecution.

Again, the deputies and committees of the revolutionary governments in France were not the first to attempt to control speech within their jurisdiction, and there are many useful parallels to be drawn from the historical antecedents of their policies. Three prime examples will be briefly examined here. The first concerns the policing of heretical speech by ecclesiastical authorities both before and after the Protestant Reformation, a crusade

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<sup>7</sup> The literature on the censorship of printed works is considerable, and cannot be dealt with adequately here. To mention just a few works on France: Henri-Jean Martin, *Livre, pouvoirs et société à Paris au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Genève, 1969); Nicole Hermann-Mascard, *La censure des livres à Paris à la fin de l'ancien régime, 1750-1789* (Paris, 1968); Daniel Roche, "Censorship and the Publishing Industry", in Darnton and Roche (eds.), *Revolution in Print*, pp. 3-26 and notes pp. 313-5; and the contributions to the volume, François Furet, et al. (ed.), *Livre et société dans la France du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (2 vols., Paris, 1970).



which included the Holy Inquisition of the Catholic Church, as well as the persecution of heretical sects such as the Lollards in England. Like the later revolutionary courts, ecclesiastical authorities admitted hearsay evidence, considered public statements more serious than private ones, and suspected that a greater evil was behind the defendants' crime. In the second example, the policing of verbal sedition in seventeenth-century England, we are brought even closer to the revolutionary case, in that the words are political, the period is one of political disruption, and the authorities are concerned with maintaining control over the circulation of information. A third and final example, the surveillance of popular opinion in Paris under the *ancien régime* and specifically, in the reign of Louis XV, will set the stage, for revolutionary governments could not have helped but be influenced by pre-1789 policies regarding political sedition.

### **Heresy and the Inquisition**

Although the heresy trials of the Inquisition are far from being the only, or even the first, example of prosecution for verbal crime, the era provides some useful and thought-provoking parallels with the period of the French Revolution. As in the courts of the revolutionary era, the ecclesiastical courts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries drew on extremely expansive legal definitions of what constituted legal crime, and heretical words – especially when spoken in public – were considered to be at least equal in importance to heretical actions. Henry Kamen, in his study of the Spanish Inquisition, writes that while “the offence arose less with the words than with the intention behind them and the implicit danger to faith and morals”, the “overwhelming bulk of prosecutions was for purely verbal offences”, which the inquisitors classified as “propositions”.<sup>8</sup> Ecclesiastical courts were, in general, concerned with controlling the spread of heresy, an evil which had its roots essentially in the dynamics of communication.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, a brief glance at the way in which the trials themselves were conducted confirms that in many ways, the Revolution marked a return to an earlier era of

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: An Historical Revision* (London, 1997), pp. 260-1. See also James Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society: Power, Discipline and Resistance in Languedoc* (Ithaca NY, 1997), and Ginzburg, “The Inquisitor”.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Arno Borst, “La transmission de l’hérésie au Moyen Age”, pp. 273-80, and Robert Mandrou, “La transmission de l’hérésie à l’époque moderne”, pp. 281-87, both in Jacques Le Goff (ed.), *Hérésies et sociétés dans l’Europe pré-industrielle, XI<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, Communications et débats du Colloque de Royaumont* (Paris, 1968).



inquisitorial techniques and doctrinal conformity.<sup>10</sup> The evidence admitted in trials for heretical speech in the early modern era, for example, was often sketchy: the accounts of merely one or two witnesses, or even a single piece of hearsay, could be enough to convict the accused. One Frenchman, a certain Sébastien Guillen from Grenade, in the north of the modern-day department of the Haute-Garonne, only narrowly escaped an *autodafé* in Grenoble in 1574, because of his heretical words:

Sébastien Guillen...fut accusé par un témoin d'avoir dit que le pouvoir du Souverain Pontife ne valait rien et que la secte des luthériens était la bonne et que c'est en elle que l'on devait se sauver et que la foi seule sans les oeuvres suffisait, et beaucoup d'autres erreurs de la secte de Luther. Il nia et, averti qu'il allait être soumis à la torture, il avoua entièrement. Il fut réconcilié avec port de l'habit, prison perpétuelle et quatre ans de galères.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from the threat of torture, the elements of Guillen's indictment closely resemble those of any number of cases conducted for political purposes under the French Revolution: the defendant was accused by one witness only, and convicted for nothing more than for having expressed an opinion. In the earlier era as in the later, denunciations could easily have been the work of a resentful bystander. In Spain, "ordinary people who in casual conversation, or in moments of anger or stress, expressed sentiments that offended their neighbours, were likely to find themselves denounced to the Inquisition and correspondingly disciplined"; in many cases, the role of the courts, as during the Revolution, turned out to be the resolution of local disputes.<sup>12</sup>

Similarities can also be found in assumptions of how dissenting opinion was formed. Under the Inquisition, defendants were often asked to name their accomplices or those who had influenced them in their opinions, and authorities demonstrated a certain reluctance to believe that the words were simply the result of an uneducated individual's independent thoughts. The case of Menocchio, the sixteenth-century Italian miller immortalised in the work of Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, is exemplary here. Arrested for common-sensical yet disruptive statements about religion and government alike, Menocchio maintained in his interrogation that no outside influence had

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<sup>10</sup> I am indebted to William Olejniczak of the College of Charleston for this observation, which was made in the context of the session, "Spaces and Networks of Political Communication in the French Revolution", at the 47<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the S.F.H.S. in Chapel Hill, NC (April 2001). See also Chartier, *Cultural Origins*, pp. 193-8.

<sup>11</sup> Bartolomé Bennassar, "Les Français devant les tribunaux de l'Inquisition espagnole", in *La France d'ancien régime: Études réunies en l'honneur de Pierre Goubert*, (Toulouse, 1984), vol.1, pp. 55-60; citation p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Kamen, *Spanish Inquisition*, pp. 260-1. See also Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, second edition (London/New York, 1995), p. 72.



put the ideas into his head. Like the rural citizens whose straightforward statements we read in chapter III, Menocchio stood firmly by his right to hold an opinion. "My opinions came out of my head", he is quoted as having said; "...I have an artful mind, and I have wanted to seek out higher things about which I did not know."<sup>13</sup>

A final similarity across the centuries is to be found in the underlying motivation for the pursuit of statements and opinions which went against the grain. Like the public prosecutors in French revolutionary courts, the inquisitors insisted that the faithful conform to a strictly defined set of beliefs: those who spoke in a way which threatened to undermine others' opinions had to be rooted out, prevented from speaking, and an example made of their heresy. Moreover, the definitions of legal crime evolved according to institutional and political requirements. Although it was the heretical incantations and spells spoken by witches which were ostensibly feared by the established church, historians of the phenomenon have argued that the restraints placed on words spoken in public were directly linked to the growing power of the centralised state. In her study of the prosecution of "witch-speak" in Elizabethan England, Kirilka Stavreva stresses that the actions of the monarchy amounted to the creation of a "political technology of public speech", marking "the social limits beyond which individuals could not use their speech...as they saw fit", and denoting a "low tolerance for the public expression of discontent."<sup>14</sup> Brian Levack, similarly, identifies the "fear of rebellion, sedition and disorder that beset members of the upper classes during these years" as key factors in the formulation of the concept of witchcraft. "It is no coincidence", Levack continues, "that the earliest descriptions of the witches' Sabbath appeared when Europe was experiencing a wave of social rebellions in the late fourteenth century."<sup>15</sup> In Reformation Europe as in revolutionary France, then, the support of judicial sanctions against dissenting opinions allowed rulers to consolidate their power and establish control over a diverse population. These themes will be central to the pages which follow on the relationship between revolutionary authorities and rural dissenters.

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<sup>13</sup> Ginzburg, *Cheese and the Worms*, pp. 12 and 27.

<sup>14</sup> Kirilka Stavreva, "Fighting Words: Witch-Speak in Late Elizabethan Docu-Fiction", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 30 (2000), pp. 309-38; citations from pp. 331-2.

<sup>15</sup> Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, pp. 64-5. Levack cites numerous cases in which rebels against the ruling power were accused of heresy and witchcraft alongside charges of rebellion and treason; see p. 66-7. See also Peter Elmer, "Towards a Politics of Witchcraft in Early Modern England", in Stuart Clark (ed.), *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 101-18.



## Treason and libel in early modern England

While there are certainly some interesting similarities between the prosecution of heretical statements in early modern Europe and the policing of political talk during the French Revolution, there are also some notable differences. The prosecuting body, for example, was not a national government but an international institution, and the maxims enforced were not related to political allegiance, but to religious opinion alone. In these respects, the prosecution of treacherous or seditious speech and of political libel in early modern England is a more direct antecedent, and the fact that historians have devoted considerable attention to the topic makes for a rich comparison.<sup>16</sup> From the enforcement of the Reformation in the period of Oliver Cromwell and the policing of speech in the late sixteenth century, through the era of the Civil War and the Restoration in the late seventeenth century to the instability of the late eighteenth century, periods of political crisis and of consolidation of royal power were marked, in England, by renewed efforts in the prosecution of dissent.

As a result, if the French revolutionary deputies were looking for precedents as they drafted their legislation, they would have found plenty among the English statutes. The law of treason as used in the British Isles was based on the original statute of Edward III, decreed in 1325, which made it an offence to “imagine or compass the death of the king; make war against him; or aid his enemies.”<sup>17</sup> As amended by Henry VIII in 1534, the law allowed for treason which was committed by “words or writing”, although officially the court had to prove that the words constituted – at least in intention – an overt act.<sup>18</sup> The series of statutes known as *Scandalum magnatum* allowed a much more general application, and were therefore increasingly used to prosecute political sedition. Originating in 1275 under Edward I, the *Scandalum* as it existed in the mid-sixteenth century defined a “seditious” as any person who

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<sup>16</sup> Please see, in particular, G.R. Elton, *Policy and Police: the Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge, 1972); Christopher Duggan, “The Advent of Political Thought-Control in England: Seditious and Treasonable Speech, 1485-1547”, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1993; Philip Hamburger, “The Development of the Law of Seditious Libel and the Control of the Press”, *Stanford Law Review*, 37 (1984-85), pp. 661-765; Samaha, “Gleanings”; Fox, “Rumour”; Sharp, “Popular Political Opinion”; and John Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793-1796* (Oxford, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Hamburger, “Development”.

<sup>18</sup> Although Elton maintains that conviction of seditious words under treason law was unlikely except in times of extreme crisis (*Policy and Police*, pp. 286-8), Christopher Duggan has made a convincing argument regarding the initiative of both Henry VII and Henry VIII in amending the early treason statutes to encompass mere political dissent, as well as incitations to political violence. See Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp.286-8; Duggan, “Advent of Political Thought-Control”, pp.1-4.



...shall maliciously of his or their imagination speak any false seditious and slanderous news, rumours, sayings or tales of our said sovereign lord and King or of our said most natural sovereign lady and Queen, or...of the speaking or reporting of any other... or to the encouraging, stirring or moving of any insurrection of rebellion within this realm...<sup>19</sup>

The punishment for sedition under this statute was either the pillory and both ears cut off, or, if preferred – for the wealthier seditious – a £100 fine and three months in prison. Under the reign of Elizabeth I, both the law and the penalties were made more severe: those who wished for, imagined, or predicted the death of the queen – or even simply wondered who would succeed her or what it would be like when she died – were included as seditious, and those caught in a second offence were subject to the death penalty.<sup>20</sup> Other laws, finally, including those against heresy (for religious matters) and seditious libel (for both written and verbal defamation) could also be used to punish dissidents.

In addition to their purpose – to control the speech of the inhabitants of the realm – the English sedition laws resemble those of the French revolutionary governments in other ways, revealing that many of the problems and issues were similar in both situations. As was already mentioned, under the law of treason, the prosecuting attorneys were required to produce evidence that the speaker's intention had been treacherous, an inconvenience which limited its effectiveness in political trials. As historian Geoffrey Elton relates, regarding the era of Thomas Cromwell,

It would be quite wrong to suppose that anything would do, or that the decision to proceed depended on the mere whim of the men in power. On the contrary, if there was any doubt at all whether a supposed offence amounted to treason there was only one authority which could decide – that of the lawyers and especially the judges... Charges were weighed and the distinction between words treasonable by the statute and other words at best seditious was observed. Since denunciations could be wild and vague, a good deal of essentially harmless talk could be dangerous, but a good deal reported could also be extremely hard to assess.<sup>21</sup>

Even the *Scandalum magnatum* was, in theory, valid only against the spreading of news and tales to do with the sovereigns which were *false*, allowing for the possibility of public embarrassment if the defence counsel were to succeed in proving the rumours to be true.<sup>22</sup> Other laws, including the Tudor felony statutes which allowed for the inclusion of dissent,

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<sup>19</sup> 1&2 Philip and Mary, c.3 (1554), cited in Samaha, "Gleanings", pp. 64-5.

<sup>20</sup> 23 Eliz. c.2, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 65. See also, on this theme, Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, pp. 1-44. Indeed, in the case of treason trials under William Pitt, it would seem that the English were inspired by the French.

<sup>21</sup> Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp. 301-4.

<sup>22</sup> Roger B. Manning, "The Origine of the Doctrine of Sedition", *Albion* 12 (1980), pp. 99-121; Hamburger, "Development", pp. 668-9.



were deemed to be too harsh in practice, and their application was resisted by the judiciary.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of the different inconveniences of the various legal options for controlling criticism and dissent, the richness of court records for the period shows that much of the time, English monarchs succeeded in bringing dissenters to trial. Moreover, although some research has focussed primarily on urban areas and upon the elite population of those areas, far more has been done on seditious speech in rural England than in comparable regions of France. Making good use of the archives which accumulated as a result of the needs of various governments to monitor the pulse of public opinion, historians of the English countryside have demonstrated that official concerns extended to the “free speaking and irreverent chatter of the populace” as early as the Elizabethan era.<sup>24</sup> “Direct evidence of popular expression is hard to discover,” writes Buchanan Sharp of the Restoration period, “but it can be found.”<sup>25</sup> Adam Fox agrees, pointing out that while “historians of ‘high’ politics” have tended to neglect the “opinions of most ordinary people”, either because they are too difficult to find and recreate or because they simply think them irrelevant, “it is not possible to understand the national significance of political processes at the centre without also appreciating their social and regional depth.”<sup>26</sup> Joel Samaha, finally, goes as far as berating historians for ignoring the common people, and not working harder to seek their voice among the documentation.<sup>27</sup> “When the majority have been mentioned,” he writes in the preface to his work on sedition among the ‘inarticulate’ of Essex, “it has generally been in disparaging terms – they were violent, they were lazy, they were coarse, and they were stupid... Little or no effort has been made to listen to their words... they are almost always spoken for by others.” Having uncovered a tremendously rich archive of verbal outbursts among the rural population, Samaha goes on to examine in detail the nature and consequences of popular dissent, concluding, like Fox and Sharp, that the project is immensely worthwhile

Finally, as each of these historians shows for different periods over a span of nearly two centuries, the common people of early modern England voiced their opinions in exclamations, bawdy songs, remarks of discontent and discouragement – in short, in much the same way as the peasants of revolutionary France. The comments recorded are

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<sup>23</sup> Hamburger, “Development”, p. 671.

<sup>24</sup> The expression is from Fox, “Rumour”, p. 599.

<sup>25</sup> Sharp, “Popular Political Opinion”, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Fox, “Rumour”, p. 598.

<sup>27</sup> Samaha, “Gleanings”, pp. 61ff.



far from being parochial, simplistic remarks on rural problems: they reveal an intelligent awareness of the political situation and a variety of strong opinions, justifying the authorities' concerns but not their prejudices. While the topics of discussion varied from the health of the sovereign and the conduct of members of the royal court to the policies of church and state, as Adam Fox points out, "popular dissent was not merely intemperate invective but amounted to more thoughtful opposition, while even the articulation of specific grievances might develop into quite subtle discussion of the wider constitutional issues."<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Buchanan Sharp, working specifically on the period of the Restoration, differentiates, among the popular comments in his sample, between the "scurrilous words about the King and his family, sometimes accompanied by expressions of anti-Catholicism", and the more politicised words of "self-conscious supporters of Puritanism or the Cromwellian regime and enemies on principle of monarchy and episcopacy."<sup>29</sup> Clearly, while seditious comments vary widely from one historical era to another and between countries, there are remarkable parallels to be drawn between the official response to dissent on either side of the Channel.

### *Lèse-majesté* and sedition in *ancien régime* France

Much like their English counterparts, the ruling powers of medieval and early modern France had traditionally demonstrated little tolerance for seditious acts and words. Since the early Valois there had existed laws against *lèse-majesté*, the most heinous of crimes, literally signifying an injury done to the royal person.<sup>30</sup> It was this charge that was brought against Ravaillac, the gibbering madman who murdered Henri IV in 1610, as well as against Damiens, the would-be assassin of Louis XV. The law of *lèse-majesté* had its basis in the obedience and loyalty owed the king by his subjects, and as such, was ultimately derived from his divine right to rule. A category of the law known as *lèse-majesté divine* accordingly included religious offences such as heresy, simony, sacrilege, and blasphemy, and amounted to crimes against God, which were punished as an attack against God's appointed representative on earth: the sovereign.<sup>31</sup> The main category,

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<sup>28</sup> Fox, "Rumour", *passim*; citation from p. 619.

<sup>29</sup> Sharp, "Popular Political Opinion", p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> Jourdan, Athanase Jean Léger, *et al.*, *Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises, depuis l'an 420 jusqu'à la Révolution de 1789* (29 vols., Paris, 1821-33). The first entry for 'lèse-majesté' is in 1315, with many other adjustments following in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

<sup>31</sup> Although this is the explanation set out by the *Encyclopédie*, published in the 1750s by "enlightened" scholars, George Armstrong Kelly has argued that very little of this original respect remained by the eighteenth century. See Kelly, "From *Lèse-majesté* to *Lèse-nation*: Treason in Eighteenth-Century France", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 42 (1981), pp. 269-86, and Jeffrey Merrick, *The Desacralization of the*



however, and the one which concerns us here, was that of *lèse-majesté humaine*, referring to an attack against the sovereign or against the state. While the former was dealt with in ecclesiastical courts, the latter was left to the secular authorities, who broke it down into two levels of seriousness. *Lèse-majesté* in the first degree, which could be examined only by the *Parlement*, included physical attacks on the royal person, as well as various analogous acts of treachery, such as an attack against any member of the royal family, or, more commonly, conspiracy against the state.<sup>32</sup> In the second degree, the crime was more broadly interpreted, and included insults to the king, seditious libel and encouraging rebellion against royal authority, as well as counterfeiting, smuggling, duelling, desertion, and conspiring against lesser members of the royal administration.

Thus, the early laws against high treason were used to prosecute not only attacks on the life of the monarch, but also attacks upon his honour or his authority, by such means as seditious speech or writings. Indeed, the relevance of verbal crime in this era cannot be underestimated. As Henry Kamen has written of the early modern period,

In a largely pre-literate age, all important social affirmations – such as personal pledges or court testimony – were made orally... A man's spoken word was his bond. Judicial evidence consisted of what some people said about others. By the same token, negative declarations – insults, slander – were usually verbal. Verbal statements directed against one's neighbours and against God or religion were treated with severity by both state and Church authorities, for they disturbed the peace of the community. All legal tribunals of the day, including the Holy Office, therefore paid attention to the consequences of the spoken word.<sup>33</sup>

In the legal system of *ancien régime* France, right up to the Revolution, attention was most certainly paid to the consequences of the spoken word. In addition to the inclusion of verbal insults and incitement to violence as forms of *lèse-majesté*, some early laws were expressly directed at verbal crime. In 1413, for example, Charles VI issued an ordinance intended to maintain calm and order in the kingdom, which prohibited all royal subjects, regardless of status, to “faire proférer ou semer paroles autrement dénotant divisions et contraires à ladite paix, ni induire les gens à venir violer ou empêcher celle-ci.”<sup>34</sup> During

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*French Monarchy in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1990).

<sup>32</sup> As enumerated in the ordonnance of Villers-Cotterets (1539), the ordonnance de Blois (1579), and the declarations of 16 August 1653, 11 November 1654, 17 May 1610 and January 1629; see the *Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises*, and the article “lèse-majesté” in *La Grande encyclopédie: inventaire raisonné des sciences, des lettres et des arts* (31 vols., Paris, 1886-1902), vol. 22, pp. 88-89.

<sup>33</sup> Kamen, *Spanish Inquisition*, p. 261.

<sup>34</sup> “Nostre intention...estre tenir perpétuellement ledit traicté et bonne paix, et icelle maintenir et garder..., ne souffrir estre enfreinte par quelque personne: en faisant exprès commandement, et deffence de par nous sur peine de confiscation de corps et de biens, qu’il ne soit aucun de quelconque estat, auctorité ou condition qu’il soit, qui face proferer ou semer parolles autrement dénotans divisions et contraires à ladite paix, ni qui puissent gens induire à venir contre icelle violer ou empêcher.” Paris, 6 octobre 1413; *Recueil*



the wars of Louis XIV, a law was passed which prescribed the death penalty for those who succeeded in convincing soldiers to desert the army,<sup>35</sup> a crime which would also be considered important during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars.

However, not all seditious speech amounted to out-and-out treason, and the philosophical and conceptual difficulty of applying severe penalties to mere complaints, statements and opinions was an important topic of discussion among the writers and critics associated with the literary movement of the Enlightenment. Louis de Jaucourt, author of the article on *lèse-majesté* in the *Encyclopédie*, argued that any attempt to punish individuals for treacherous words alone was misguided. Speech could only be considered a crime, he maintained, once it was linked to illegal action, or once the criminal intent of the words was proven. The problem, de Jaucourt pointed out, was that indiscretion could easily be mistaken for malice, and even the tone of voice with which words were spoken could change their meaning. Except in a state of tyranny, he continued, it would be impossible to make a charge of *lèse-majesté* based on words alone, using the following example to demonstrate how such a law could become tyrannical:

Il y avait dans la République de Rome une loi *de majestate*, contre ceux qui commettraient quelque attentat contre le peuple romain. Tibere se saisit de cette loi, et l'appliqua non pas au cas pour lequel elle avait été faite, mais à tout ce qui pu servir sa haine ou ses défiances. Ce n'étaient pas seulement les actions qui tombaient dans les cas de cette loi, mais des paroles indiscrettes, des signes, des songes, le silence même. Il n'y eut plus de liberté dans les festins, de confiance dans les parentés, de fidélité dans les esclaves...<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, de Jaucourt's example bears a striking resemblance to the prosecution of verbal crime under the Revolution. Words might be a police concern, but not a criminal one, he concluded: "On renverse tout, si l'on fait des paroles un crime capital."<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, de Jaucourt was not the only enlightened thinker to express the concern that spoken words were being considered a crime in themselves. The debate had, in fact, begun with the Baron de Montesquieu, who had addressed the topic in his principal work of political theory, *De L'Esprit des lois*, from which de Jaucourt had borrowed many of his arguments. While the law against *lèse-majesté*, if clearly defined as an attack on the

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*général des anciennes lois françaises*, vol. 7, pp. 408-9.

<sup>35</sup> Ordonnance portant peine de mort contre ceux qui auront provoqué des soldats à la désertion; au camp de Neidre-Asselt, 17 juin 1676; *Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises*, vol. 19, p. 161.

<sup>36</sup> Article "Lèse-majesté", in *L'Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, par une société de gens de lettres (17 vols., Paris, 1751-65), vol.9, pp. 399-401.

<sup>37</sup> De Jaucourt, "Lèse-majesté". Indeed, de Jaucourt has taken his reasoning directly from Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des lois*, Book XII, chapter 7 (see footnote 38, below).



life of the sovereign, was valid enough, Montesquieu argued that the vague application of such a terrible phrase to other crimes, such as criticism of the king's agents or counterfeiting, worked only to reduce this validity, by watering down the horror one should properly feel at an attack on the king, and was a key sign that a government had degenerated into despotism.<sup>38</sup> Its use for "paroles indiscrètes", predictions, idle thoughts, and other expressions that had no dangerous or criminal results, Montesquieu wrote, was the worst possible abuse. "Les discours sont si sujets à interprétation," he argued, "... que la Loi ne peut guère soumettre les paroles à moins qu'elle ne déclare expressément celles qu'elle y soumet." Otherwise, only words which could be tied to an illegal action should be punishable by law:

Ainsi un homme qui va dans la place publique exhorter les sujets à la révolte, devient coupable de lèse-Majesté, parce que les paroles sont jointes à l'action et y participent. Ce ne sont point les paroles que l'on punit, mais une action commise dans laquelle on emploie les paroles. Elles ne deviennent des crimes que lorsqu'elles préparent, qu'elles accompagnent ou qu'elles suivent une action criminelle...<sup>39</sup>

The Marquis de Condorcet, in his *Fragments sur la Liberté de la Presse*, echoed this last point, when he argued that an author putting forth a seditious idea only expresses an opinion, unless his words cause a revolt.<sup>40</sup>

The influence of the work of Montesquieu and, once translated into French, of that of Beccaria, brought French intellectual opinion to demand a more exact correspondence between the gravity of crimes and their punishment.<sup>41</sup> However, in spite of these strong, contemporary arguments against the prosecution of potential subversives on charges limited to verbal crimes, the royal government continued to keep a tight rein on the political utterances of its subjects. Recent attention to the police reports contained in the Bastille archives, held at the *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal* in Paris, has produced a wealth of important scholarship on the relationship between royal authority and a growing public opinion, paving the way for further studies of the nature of this opinion, both urban and

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<sup>38</sup> Montesquieu, Charles-Louis Secondat, Baron de, *De L'Esprit des Loix, ou Rapport qu'elles doivent avoir avec la Constitution de chaque gouvernement, les moeurs, le climat, la religion et le commerce...*, (3 vols., Amsterdam, 1758), book XII (Loix qui forment la Liberté politique dans son rapport avec le citoyen), chapter VI (Crime de lèse-majesté); citation, vol. 2, p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois*, book XII, chapter VII (vol. 2, p. 21).

<sup>40</sup> Condorcet, Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas De Caritat, Marquis De, "Fragments sur la Liberté de la Presse", in Arthur O'Connor and Dominique François Jean Arago (eds.), *Oeuvres complètes*, (12 vols., Paris: Firmin Didot frères, 1847-1849), vol. 11, pp. 255-314.

<sup>41</sup> Kelly, "From lèse-majesté", p. 278. Like Montesquieu, Cesare Beccaria argued for better proportion between crimes and punishments, and pointed out that "only tyranny and ignorance, which confound the clearest words and ideas, can assign the name [of lese majesty or high treason] (and consequently the ultimate punishment) to crimes of a different nature, thus making men, as on a thousand other occasions, the victims of a word." *On Crimes and Punishments*, trans. David Young (Indianapolis, 1986), p.18.



rural.<sup>42</sup> Louis XV, it would seem, possibly mindful of the revolts of the Fronde which had inspired his great-grandfather to build the castle of Versailles beyond the reach of the crowd, was interested in the political statements of the inhabitants of Paris. Police spies, or *mouches*, infiltrated the cafés, streets and public squares of the capital, listening to the “mauvais discours” of the populace and noting it down for the information of the king and his councillors. In comparison with the revolutionary period, royal authorities were concerned only with preserving the status quo, and thus while dissidents were carefully watched, they were not arrested unless their words clearly targeted public officials, especially the king, or betrayed an underlying intention to disturb public order. However, in certain cases, where the police deemed that the speaker represented a real threat, suspects were brought in, questioned, held in the Bastille, and sometimes punished for their words. Indeed, the historians who have examined the papers of both the spies and the police, while focussed on slightly different aspects of the problem, have concluded that towards the end of the *ancien régime*, the monarchy no longer held a monopoly on political discourse: indeed, “public opinion” was evolving into a critical force to be reckoned with.<sup>43</sup>

While the work of Farge and others has opened new doors for the analysis of police records in the pursuit of the words of the populace, such a study in the provinces would be virtually impossible before 1789. Whether through a lack of infrastructure and manpower, or an absence of concern over possible rural political intentions, the monarchy simply did not go to the same lengths to monitor *mauvais discours* outside of Paris. Rural subjects were rarely, if ever, charged with crimes such as *lèse-majesté*; when they do make an appearance in the archives of seditious activity, it is almost always as participants in illegal gatherings, rather than as the source of seditious opinions or statements. Although the term “sedition” is currently used to denote not only behaviour, but also speech which incites to rebellion or agitation against the authority of the state,<sup>44</sup> the use of the epithet “seditious” in describing speech is largely a phenomenon of the modern period, beginning with the Revolution. In eighteenth-century usage, “sedition”

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<sup>42</sup> The key historians involved in this important new direction were, for the most part, introduced in the introduction: Dale van Kley, *The Damiens Affair and the Unraveling of the Ancien régime, 1750-1770* (Princeton, NJ, 1984); Farge, *Subversive Words*; Graham, *If the King Only Knew* and “Crimes of Opinion”, and Darnton, “An Early Information Society”.

<sup>43</sup> Van Kley, *Damiens Affair*, pp. 10-2, and chapter 5; Graham, *If the King Only Knew*, pp. 257-67; Darnton, “An Early Information Society”, pp. 4-7 and 34-5; Farge, *Subversive Words*, pp. 196-9.

<sup>44</sup> Judy Pearsall and Bill Trumble (eds.), *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary* (Oxford/New York, 1996), p. 1310.



referred only to “un trouble, une division, une émotion, une révolte”, or any large gathering which occurred without the permission of the magistrates, or against their authority; “les séditeux” referred to those who were illegally gathered.<sup>45</sup> Any references to the statements, ideas, or opinions which might have inspired the revolt invariably implied that such instigation must have been the work of educated outsiders.

The strength of the contemporary association of rural sedition with civil disobedience and violence is demonstrated by existent police enquiries into such crimes in the rural south-west. Incidents of “sedition” invariably concerned illicit gatherings for such motives as organised tax evasion, and the spreading of “fausses nouvelles”, a serious charge under the Revolution, usually referred to nothing more than the passing on of malicious, unfounded gossip.<sup>46</sup> *Sédition* in the eighteenth century, in fact, often concerned what would be called *résistance à la loi* or *rébellion à justice* during the French Revolution: groups of armed peasants banded together in order to force a situation in their favour or to prevent justice from being done to one of their own. A typical example is that of Jean Marsan, *dit* Chicoyjean, who was convicted in 1763 of having been the “instigateur et chef d’attroupement” as well as a “séditieux, rebelle et violent” in an incident which had occurred on the road between Bordeaux and Biscarosse.<sup>47</sup> Chicoyjean and five other individuals, all labourers or artisans and inhabitants of the same village, had ambushed the *maréchaussée* with the intention of liberating Chicoyjean’s brother and his brother’s companion Lamadou, both members of the coast guard, who were being taken to Bordeaux as prisoners. At first, the ambush was successful; after a short conflict with the brigade, Chicoyjean and his associates made off with both the prisoners and the *maréchaussée*’s horses. However, they were later discovered and arrested, and Chicoyjean and three of his five companions were sentenced to hang. Such examples are not uncommon: *séditions* and *émotions populaires* against various authorities, including local *seigneurs* and municipal councils, as well as the *maréchaussée* and other representatives

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<sup>45</sup> De Jaucourt, “Sédition”, in *L’Encyclopédie*. For examples of the use of ‘séditieux’, see the law on *attroupements*, 10 mars 1681 (*Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises*, vol.19, p. 262), which specifies that the *séditeux* must number 10 or more for the gathering to be considered an *attroupement*; and the declaration of martial law in octobre-novembre 1789 (*Recueil général annoté des lois, décrets, ordonnances, etc.*, vol.1, p. 22), in which those who resist authority and do not disperse peacefully are called “les séditeux”.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, the case against Jeanne Simonette of Pamiers (Ariège), accused of “fausses nouvelles”. A.D. Ariège, 1B37, pièces 11-13, Sénéchaussée de Pamiers, interrogation et informations, 29 avril 1709.

<sup>47</sup> A.D. Dordogne, B683, Arrêt du Parlement de Bordeaux qui condamne Jean Marsan, *dit* Chicoyjean, chirurgien, à être pendu, pour sédition, rébellion, violences et voies de fait envers la maréchaussée en fonctions, 3 septembre 1763.



of the royal government, constituted a significant component of rural justice under the *ancien régime*.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, to judge from the paucity of archival evidence, rural inhabitants were only very rarely charged with seditious speech.<sup>49</sup> As we have seen in previous chapters, conversations certainly took place which might have been interpreted as subversive or disloyal. However, their relative absence from pre-revolutionary archives confirms the tendency of local authorities to view the populace as politically inactive, and thus undeserving of any serious scrutiny. The few exceptions differ from the majority of cases in two main respects. First of all, they involve a statement of opinion directed at the king himself, rather than at an aspect of his rule, such as taxes, recruitment, or the social order. A 1713 ruling of the *Parlement* of Bordeaux, for example, condemned a man named Queyroux, of the nearby town of Cadillac, to an indefinite prison sentence, for having “tenu des discours scandaleux, séditieux, injurieux et offensants contre la personne sacrée du Roy, et contre les prêtres, religieux et contre la religion catholique.” The case had originally been sent to the seigneurial court, but given the gravity of the crime, the local judges had declared themselves unable to decide the affair. Even the magistrates of the *Parlement* had pleaded incompetence, and Queyroux served his sentence at the Conciergerie in Paris.<sup>50</sup> Clearly, statements made against the king, even by provincials, fell into a category altogether apart from the “seditions” and “emotions” which were dealt with on a daily basis.

The second difference with the statements in question is that they were made within earshot of one or more politically aware individual, who recognised the crime and took the trouble to report it. Michel Baron, for example, the first *consul* of the village of Gourdan, near Pamiers in the Ariège, was reported by his fellow municipal officers in

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<sup>48</sup> Both Julius Ruff and Steven Reinhardt address the question of sedition and collective violence primarily in the context of the defence of economic rights: Ruff, *Crime, Justice and Public Order in Old Regime France: The Sénéchaussées of Libourne and Bazas, 1696-1789* (London, 1984), chapter 6; Reinhardt, *Justice in the Sarladais, 1770-1790* (Baton Rouge LA, 1991), pp. 236-7.

<sup>49</sup> Studies of criminal justice in rural society during the *ancien régime* make scant mention of any police concern with the opinions and statements of the peasantry. See Iain Cameron, *Crime and Repression in the Auvergne and the Guyenne, 1720-1790* (Cambridge, 1981); Ruff, *Crime, Justice and Public Order*; Malcolm Greenshields, *An Economy of Violence in Early Modern France: Crime and Justice in the Haute-Auvergne, 1587-1664* (University Park, PA, 1994); and Anthony Crubaugh, *Balancing the Scales of Justice: Local Courts and Rural Society in Southwest France, 1750-1800* (University Park, PA, 2001). Reinhardt, in *Justice in the Sarladais*, is the only scholar who mentions verbal crime; however, his examples are limited to parish priests speaking against local *seigneurs*, see pp. 254-7.

<sup>50</sup> A.D. Gironde, série B, Arrêts de Parlement non-côtés, juillet-août 1713; pièces concernant Queyroux (6 et 8 juillet, 18 août 1713). No further reference to Queyroux' case was found in the archives, leaving us ignorant of his identity and circumstances.



1772 for having insulted the king.<sup>51</sup> As it transpired, his statements were made after a fellow villager had reported that in Toulouse, it was said that the king planned to demand higher taxes on both land and produce. Returning home from the village at the end of the day in the company of three other men, Baron recalled the news they had heard, and remarked that the king was a “fripon, et qu’il voulait manger la France”. His companions cautioned him, saying that if he were overheard, he risked the hangman’s noose; but Baron only retorted, in the local *patois*, “who do you think would go and tell the king? and what could he do?”<sup>52</sup>

Apparently, someone did report Baron’s words, for he was arrested one week later. His error might have been that he made his statement in the company of other well-to-do farmers, colleagues who might have envied his position as first consul. Like Baron, Queyroux was likely overheard by people of some political awareness, as he came from a commercial town not far from Bordeaux. Nonetheless, these two cases are by far the exception: the inns and markets of the south-western countryside did not teem with police spies, as did the cafés and streets of Paris in the same period. Put simply, the government had more important things to worry about than the statements of insignificant villagers. The very fact that seditious assemblies, virtually the only option available to peasants to contest royal policy, were called popular *émotions* clearly shows that in the minds of the authorities, the crime was one of instinct rather than of rational thought. This attitude is even visible in de Jaucourt’s article on sedition in the *Encyclopédie*. Such movements, he writes, “proviennent d’erreur lorsqu’un peuple croit qu’on lui a fait du mal, ou qu’on a eu dessein de lui en faire... Il y a sans doute de la méchanceté dans ceux qui excitent ces séditions; mais le peuple n’y est jamais entraîné que par erreur.”<sup>53</sup> Whether the French peasantry was politically minded in the eighteenth century or not is a topic worthy of debate; what is clear, however, is that the government did not believe it to be.

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<sup>51</sup> A.D. Ariège, 1B204, pièces 1-4, Sénéchaussée de Pamiers, procès mené par le procureur du Roi contre Michel Baron, consul de Gourdan, pour injures contre le roi.

<sup>52</sup> According to the three witnesses, Baron had said, “qu’il se f— du Roy, et qu’il était un f— V—; qui voulez-vous qui aille le lui dire? que veut-il nous faire?” A.D. Ariège, 1B204, pièce 4, Informations, 24 septembre 1772.

<sup>53</sup> De Jaucourt, article “Sédition”, *L’Encyclopédie*.



## Legislation against Seditious Speech during the French Revolution

The establishment of the National Assembly in June of 1789 did not immediately change the apparent demarcation between political and popular sedition, but it did bring the issue to the fore. A re-drawing of the rules concerning freedom of expression had clearly been on the deputies' agenda, and an initial statement of policy was contained in article X of the Declaration of the Rights of Man.<sup>54</sup> However, between the threat of conspiracy against the new regime from dissident elements, and the effervescence of Parisian crowds in the wake of the storming of the Bastille, the members of the National Assembly were forced to put new laws against treason into place quickly. Pushed by popular demand for a court to judge those who had resisted the will of the people on 14 July,<sup>55</sup> the National Assembly took advantage of the opportunity to make a grandiose announcement: since the nation had clearly replaced the king as the embodiment of sovereign power,<sup>56</sup> any treachery against the state would henceforth be punished as "lèse-nation", a clever neologism which fired the popular imagination. The *Comité des rapports*, which was established on 28 July 1789 and renamed the *Comité des recherches* on 25 August, was designed to receive and report on correspondence relating to troubles in the provinces, investigate charges of *lèse-nation*, and "serve as a political police,"<sup>57</sup> and a single "Haute-Cour" was proposed to act as a supreme court in cases of political justice.<sup>58</sup> Until the establishment of a provisional court in Orléans in March 1791, trials were held at the Châtelet, an ordinary civil court, in Paris;<sup>59</sup> indeed, the actual *Haute Cour nationale*

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<sup>54</sup> Article 10 of the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* proclaims "liberté d'opinion et de conscience", provided that the manifestation of these does not disturb the public order. See Jean-Pierre Royer, *Histoire de la justice en France: De la monarchie absolue à la République* (Paris, 1986), p. 247.

<sup>55</sup> Raymond Lindon and Daniel Amson, *La Haute Cour, 1789-1987* (Paris, 1987), p. 13; Roussel, Ernest-Antoine, *La Haute Cour nationale à Orléans, 1791-1792. Discours prononcé lors de l'Audience solennelle de rentrée du Cour d'appel d'Orléans, 16 octobre 1901* (Orléans, 1901), p. 4. According to Roussel, the district which was the most vocal in demanding a *tribunal politique* was les Filles-St-Thomas.

<sup>56</sup> G.A. Kelly has argued that the "mutation of treason itself in the light of the new understanding of the 'nation', its composition and center of gravity" actually occurred before the birth of the political nation in 1789, a position which is supported by the contestation of Jeffrey Merrick and others that the monarchy had lost its divine attributes in the eyes of the people. See Kelly, "From *Lèse-majesté*", p. 278; Merrick, *Desacralization*, and Darnton, "An Early Information Society", pp. 14-5.

<sup>57</sup> Jones, *Longman Companion*, p. 93. The multifaceted arguments for the formation of, first, a *Comité des rapports*, and then the *Comité des recherches*, are expertly described by archivist Pierre Caillet (ed.), *Comité des recherches de l'Assemblée nationale, 1789-1791: inventaire analytique de la sous-série D XXIXbis* (Paris, 1993), introduction, pp. 9-26. See also Michel Eude, "Le Comité de surveillance de l'Assemblée législative, 1791-1792", *A.h.R.f.*, 36 (1964), pp.129-48, and Albert Troux, "La police politique pendant la Révolution française", *Information historique*, 14 (1952), pp. 1-14 and 127-35.

<sup>58</sup> Godechot, *Les Institutions*, p. 145; Royer, *Histoire de la justice*, p. 300.

<sup>59</sup> Edmond Seligman, *La Justice en France pendant la Révolution, 1789-1792* (2 vols., Paris, 1901), vol.1, pp. 19-33. Defendants charged with *lèse-nation* continued to be tried at the Châtelet for more than a year, from 21 October 1789 to 25 October 1790.



was not fully functional until March 1792.

Unfortunately, in spite of these institutional overtures, the *Haute Cour nationale* was an utter failure as a judicial institution. Willed into existence by decree of the National Assembly on 10 May 1791, its installation was continuously delayed; in the end, it operated for only six months, from 25 March to 25 September 1792. Of the 23 cases and 142 defendants sent before the *Haute Cour* during those six months, a verdict was reached in only three, due to disorganisation, administrative obstacles, and political hesitancy. In fact, the four judges and twenty-four jury members had so little work to occupy them, that the inhabitants of Orléans petitioned the National Convention in August to have them removed, complaining that

...les Orléanais souffrent depuis longtemps de voir que les MM de la Haute-Cour nationale ont 22 livres par jour pour ne rien faire; ils répugnent tous à juger les coupables; ils s'amuse seulement à voir les petites filles depuis le matin jusqu'au soir; voilà leurs occupations ordinaires... renvoyez donc tous ces pervers et ignorants...<sup>60</sup>

The petitioners were correct: the officials of the *Haute Cour nationale* were being paid tremendous salaries for very little work. In October 1792, the *conventionnel* Danton would argue against its resurrection, pointing out that three verdicts had cost the nation three million *livres*.<sup>61</sup> However, the true death blow had already been dealt: when the investigation into the "enlèvement" of the King, the most important case assigned to the *Haute Cour* to that point, was happily dismissed by the National Assembly after the king's acceptance of the Constitution, there seemed no further reason for the institution to remain.

On the one hand, the establishment of the *Haute Cour nationale* had been a clear bid, on the part of an unfledged National Assembly, to appease the populace by demonstrating strength and decisiveness in the face of those conspiring to overthrow the regime. A short-lived but opportunist newspaper, entitled *Le Journal de la Haute-Cour nationale*, offered to provide scintillating details of each case:

Ce journal présente un grand intérêt à toutes les personnes attachées aux Tribunaux criminels, à celles que la confiance de leurs Concitoyens a revêtus de la qualité imminente de Hauts-Jurés, et enfin à tous les amis de la révolution... Nous annonçons que les détails que nous donnerons seront d'autant plus vrais, que notre position nous met plus à même que personne de nous les procurer avec exactitude

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<sup>60</sup> Cited in abbé Paul Guillaume, "La Haute cour nationale à Orléans", *Bulletin de la Société archéologique et historique de l'Orléanais*, nouv. série, 1 (1960), pp. 233-5.

<sup>61</sup> *Réimpression de l'Ancien Moniteur*, 7 octobre 1792, vol. 14, p. 140. Danton pointed out that the criminal court established in Paris had passed judgement on 60 cases in 2 months, with modest expenses, whereas the *Haute Cour*, with a budget of 3,000,000 livres, had only judged three in a year. Roussel, a local historian and *procureur général* at the *Cour d'appel* in Orléans in 1901, found that the exact cost was more likely between 300,000 and 1,000,000 livres; *La Haute Cour*, p. 51.



et célérité. [...] En est-il un de vous qui ne soit impatient de connaître le sort et la destinée de ces perfides conjurés, dont l'exemple doit effrayer ceux qui seraient tentés de les imiter?<sup>62</sup>

On the other hand, the *Haute Cour* and its accompanying legislation also acknowledged a significant broadening of the political sphere. The emphasis placed on the crime of *lèse-nation* in this early period demonstrates that an attack on the sovereign nation – whether in the strict sense of a conspiracy or intelligence with the enemy, or in a wider sense, including actions and public statements intended to turn citizens away from their duties and loyalties – was considered to be of the utmost political importance. In the newly democratised political sphere, moreover, such seditious activity might conceivably come from any level, and it was dangerous precisely because citizens at all levels might be turned away from their loyalties. As we shall see, the relevance of this revolutionary episode to the seditious statements of peasants lies in the disparity, at the beginning of the Revolution, between the government's definition of *lèse-nation* and its interpretation by provincial authorities.

Yet how was *lèse-nation* defined? In those instances where it was applied, did it include seditious speech, or only large-scale conspiracy? The fact that I have not yet stated a definition for *lèse-nation* is intentional, for neither was it clear to contemporaries. The law of 23-31 July 1789, and the many others which followed, specified only the courts which would judge the crime and the penalties risked by its perpetrators: as for what sort of actions constituted *lèse-nation*, it was stated only that such decisions would be made by *Comité de législation*.<sup>63</sup> Clearly, the government's primary concern was subversive activity of the sort that might bring down the revolutionary government such as the actions of *émigrés* both within France and abroad, and plots hatched in collusion with foreign powers. Among the cases sent before the *Haute Cour nationale* were the conspiracy of the cardinal de Rohan, the trial of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Delessart, and the charges against the journalist Marat. However, in their company we find provincial citizens arrested for much lesser crimes. As one of the *Haute-Cour nationale*'s high officials wrote to the president of the National Assembly in April of 1791, it seemed a waste of time for the court to be judging cases such as that of Guillard, accused of "discours injurieux contre l'Assemblée nationale", those of Lenormand and Tisset, each

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<sup>62</sup> "Prospectus", *Journal de la Haute-Cour Nationale*, 1er août 1791. B.N., 8°Lc2-604, 1791-92. Not about to miss an opportunity to turn a profit, the editors also offered to print speeches for the defence, for the reasonable sum of 3 livres per page.

<sup>63</sup> Eude, "Le Comité de surveillance", pp. 131-3.



accused of having written “écrits repréhensibles”, or that of a certain Sr Marquenot, accused of having announced, to the sound of a drum, that the *champarts* should no longer be paid, all of whom should be treated, he argued, as simple “perturbateurs de l’ordre public”. “Je craindrais,” he admitted, “que ces poursuites devant la Haute Cour nationale provisoire pour des délits qui ne ressemblent pas à des crimes de lèse-nation, ne contribuassent à diminuer l’horreur que ce crime doit inspirer, et l’idée de l’importance des fonctions confiées au tribunal destiné à le punir.”<sup>64</sup>

Thus, like the political and legal theorists of the eighteenth century, the revolutionaries responsible for the *Haute Cour nationale* felt that crimes which consisted only of “words” should be considered just “simple offences”. In their correspondence with the National Assembly, the magistrates implored the higher authorities for more precise instructions. In one letter addressed to the *garde des Sceaux*, an official of the *Haute Cour nationale* requested details on various topics, including how the prisons should be policed, what to do if witnesses were unable to travel to Orléans, and where judgements should be carried out, before reaching the crux of the matter:

...il en est une [question], infiniment plus délicate et plus inquiétante que les membres du tribunal doivent plus particulièrement lui soumettre, c’est la définition exacte du crime de Lèse-nation. Il est important d’établir les différentes nuances des délits, comme celles des peines. Des Magistrats ne peuvent et ne doivent jamais oublier que, dépositaires des lois, ils ne sont spécialement chargés que d’en faire l’application, et non de les interpréter, ni de poser des lignes de démarcation, c’est ici le devoir du législateur. M le garde des sceaux est donc supplié de venir au secours d’un tribunal, dont les intentions sont pures et qui ne veut marcher qu’avec la loi.<sup>65</sup>

Although the danger of seditious activity was clearly recognised, there was a great deal of reluctance on all sides to draw a line between high treason and lesser offences. In the end, it was the incredible proliferation of such “lesser offences”, primarily the voicing of anti-revolutionary opinions, throughout the nation which led the National Assembly to take a firmer position on seditious speech.

Indeed, a cursory glance at the hundreds of petitions sent to the *Comité des rapports* and the denunciations forwarded to the *Comité des recherches* indicates an extremely wide interpretation, on the part of rural communities, of what might be meant by “seditious” speech or behaviour. Age-old conflicts with a cantankerous individual in

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<sup>64</sup> A.N. BB<sup>3</sup> 19, lettre de L. Debuc au président de l’Assemblée nationale, 21 avril 1791. Debuc’s argument is an exact parallel of that of both Louis de Jaucourt, in his article in the *Encyclopédie*, where the latter writes, “Enfin, c’est diminuer l’horreur du *crime de lèse-majesté*, que de porter ce nom sur d’autres crimes...”.

<sup>65</sup> A.N. BB<sup>3</sup>19, Lettre manuscrite, s.d., du tribunal provisoire établi à Orléans à M. le garde des Sceaux. The underlining is original to the manuscript.



the village – whether *seigneur*, *curé* or large landowner – suddenly took on a new character, as the petitioning parties hoped that the new laws against disobedience of public servants would finally solve their problem. In the mountain community of Antignac-de-Luchon (Haute-Garonne), for example, the municipal council and notables seized upon the opportunity provided by the new legislation to denounce two young troublemakers, Jean Suberoze Jouanolou *fils cadet* and Jean Antoine Mathieu:

...il n'est pas un de nous qui ne soit instruit des sujets ennemis de la Constitution du Royaume, malheureusement nous en avons dans notre petit village qui s'en sont toujours démontrés et qui s'en démontrent journellement... ce serait un crime à nous impardonnable de passer sous silence la dénonce des mauvais sujets qui tentent à mépriser les décrets des augustes représentants de la Nation... qui conspirent la Contre Révolution...<sup>66</sup>

As it transpired, the events which had led these gentlemen to denounce Jouanolou and Mathieu as “mauvais citoyens aristocrates” involved nothing more than the mischievous nocturnal displacement of two church pews and numerous paving stones, frenzies of unpredictable church-bell ringing, and general disrespect for public order and tranquillity. In another instance, the *Comité des rapports* received a report from the municipal council of the village of Caubon, in the Lot-et-Garonne, regarding their *curé*, whom they had long considered to be “a public scandal and a disgrace to the clergy”.<sup>67</sup> Among his sins, they told the National Assembly in 1790, was the fact that he charged an exorbitant amount for religious services, and that he had kept a young female “servant” for a number of years, who was now pregnant. However, it was only when he had said in public, a week earlier, that “those who sat in the Estates-General were beasts whose only goal was to destroy France”, that they had become determined to write a petition, begging the Assembly to deliver them from such an individual.

### The evolution of legislation

Clearly, the *Haute cour nationale* had not been designed to judge cases against village *curés* who spoke against the Revolution from their pulpits, or against drunken rural artisans who publicly voiced their concerns about the direction the new government was taking. Nonetheless, its institution marked the beginning of a new era in the attitude of the French authorities towards the spread of political information throughout the nation.

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<sup>66</sup> A.N. D XXIX 17 (dossier 124), Extrait des procès-verbaux du conseil municipal d'Antignac-de-Luchon, 9 décembre 1790.

<sup>67</sup> A.N. D XXIX 31 (dossier 138), Petition of the municipality of Caubon to the *Comité des Rapports*, 20 juin 1790.



During the early years of the Revolution, as we have seen, deputies were extremely keen to communicate the advantages of the new régime to that greatest part of the population, the peasantry. It was fervently believed that while the good *cultivateurs* of the provinces would not reject the changes brought by the Revolution if they were well informed, the possibility that they might be led astray by ill-intentioned individuals was altogether too great. As a result, the deputies of each successive government produced numerous decrees, in an effort to police and repress words that could alter the peasantry's attachment to their endeavour. It was according to these laws that the court cases forming the basis of this study were conducted.

The Terror tends to spring to mind as the period in which people were arrested and even executed for unacceptable political statements made in public, but in fact, each phase of the Revolution had its "enemies" and its "state of emergency" which made verbal sedition a highly punishable offence. The first discernibly discontented words in the countryside came from parish priests. As we have seen, the National Assembly had, at first, made good use of rural clerics in their traditional role as intermediaries, but a large proportion of parish priests were alienated by what they perceived as secular interference in church affairs. Soon, reports of the "seditious sermons" and "anti-constitutional words" of village *curés* began to pour into the office of the *Comité des recherches*. One such account told of the outburst of Father Rives, the *curé* of the community of Estampures, in the Hautes-Pyrénées.<sup>68</sup> A sudden hailstorm had struck the village in late May, the report related, and as the inhabitants stared balefully out from the doors of their houses, their minister had jumped about in the streets, yelling, "Look! It's raining decrees from the National Assembly!" Stooping to gather up some of the hard white pellets, he had thrown them at his parishioners, saying: "Here's something to pay your taxes with. Go to the National Assembly, they will give you a decree to clear away the hail." Such statements could hardly be abided, and the government was soon forced to reclassify their erstwhile allies as potential enemies.

The nationalization of church property on 2 November 1790 and the Civil Constitution of the Clergy which followed triggered an even greater number of outbursts from dissatisfied clerics, and as early as 26 November 1790, the deputies of the National Assembly gathered to consider what was to be done. Even had the *Haute cour nationale* functioned properly, the crime of *lèse-nation* was not specific enough to deal

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<sup>68</sup> A.N. D XXIX 37 (Estampures, Hautes-Pyrénées), Petition from the municipality of Estampures to the Comité des Rapports, 14 juillet 1790.



with the different levels of dissent emanating from rural pulpits. "Le curé de Cambon," reported M. Voydel in the name of several revolutionary committees, "proteste publiquement en chaire contre les décrets de l'Assemblée nationale... le curé de Noordpéene damne impitoyablement ceux qui acquerront des domaines nationaux... [et] M. Lavallée, prêtre habitué d'une paroisse de Rouen, prêche contre l'émission des assignats et l'aliénation des biens ci-devant ecclésiastiques." The continued resistance of parish priests throughout France, Voydel concluded, would not only destroy the new social order, but it would teach the people to scorn the work of their legislators, and encourage them to rise up in revolt.<sup>69</sup> The resulting decree, dated 27 November 1790, declared that those members of the clergy who disobeyed the laws of the National Assembly "en formant ou en excitant des oppositions" would be prosecuted by the courts as "rebelles à la loi" and "perturbateurs du repos public," whether they had sworn the oath or not.<sup>70</sup>

Across the nation, the pattern of rejection of the religious policy of the Revolution proved to be extremely complex, and the question of how to prevent *réfractaires* from poisoning public opinion in the countryside was raised in countless sessions of the National Assembly, with more than one speaker intimating that such *manoeuvres* could only be a sign of conspiracy.<sup>71</sup> However, while recalcitrant clerics would always remain a thorn in the side of the revolutionary government, the number of topics liable to elicit discontent increased with each passing year, and the *Comité de législation* had its hands full as seditious words spoken by individuals of various professions echoed throughout the various meeting places of the countryside. The authors of the Penal Code of 1791, a great achievement in enlightened legislation which brought changes to nearly every aspect of criminal justice, included a series of clauses which would be used extensively to repress general cases of seditious words in the countryside.<sup>72</sup> In addition to articles which outlawed disruption of elections and the false publication of laws, both contained under the subheading, "Crimes et attentats contre la Constitution", a total of twelve articles were devoted to crimes which were deemed to threaten the internal or external security of the state. Any type of "*manoeuvre*" or "*intelligence*" with enemies of the nation was denounced, as were "toutes conspirations et complots tendant à troubler l'État." While

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<sup>69</sup> *Réimpression de l'Ancien Moniteur*, vol.6, 26 novembre 1790, pp. 480-4. Voydel was a spokesperson for the "comités d'aliénation, ecclésiastique, des rapports et des recherches réunis".

<sup>70</sup> *Réimpression de l'Ancien Moniteur*, vol.6, 27 novembre 1790, pp. 498-500.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, the contributions of Louis-François François, *cultivateur* and deputy of the Pas-de-Calais, and of the departmental administration of the Ariège, in A.P. vol.35, pp.140-6, 18 novembre 1791.

<sup>72</sup> The entire *Code pénal*, promulgated on 6 October 1791, is printed in the A.P., vol.31, pp. 326-39.



such provisions had clearly been designed to deal with the greatest threats imaginable, one clause nonetheless left the door open for the prosecution of seditious words spoken by rural malcontents:

Section I<sup>re</sup>, Art. 4.

**Toutes manœuvres, toute intelligence avec les ennemis de la France, tendant soit à faciliter leur entrée dans les dépendances de l'Empire français, soit à leur livrer des villes, forteresses, ports, vaisseaux, magasins ou arsenaux appartenant à la France, soit à leur fournir des secours en soldats, argent, vivres ou munitions, soit à favoriser d'une manière quelconque le progrès de leurs armes sur le territoire français ou contre nos forces de terre ou de mer, soit à ébranler la fidélité des officiers, soldats et autres citoyens envers la nation française, seront punis de mort.**<sup>73</sup>

The article, as it was used, omitted the more serious forms of treason and mentioned only those parts shown here in boldface type, allowing for mere statements – if judged to have been seditiously intended – to incur the death penalty.<sup>74</sup>

However, it was not until the anti-royalist law of 4 December 1792 that provisions were made specifically against speech-crimes. During a session of the National Convention in which the fate of the king was being debated, the deputy Rewbell argued that the assembly needed to take action against individuals who might, in the meanwhile, attempt to restore the monarchy.<sup>75</sup> Public opinion, Rewbell suggested, was a fragile entity, and if not treated carefully, it could be swayed towards a resurrection of the era of kings, without even being given the chance to formally reject the Republic. The resulting text, which was passed after some discussion, decreed simply that any who *proposed or attempted* to re-establish either the monarchy or any other form of power which threatened popular sovereignty in France, would be subject to the death penalty.<sup>76</sup> Clearly, it was felt that writers and propagandists who simply *suggested* a return to a royalist regime could be dangerous. In the provinces, this type of reasoning would be applied to any individual, as it was to the weaver Thomas Bordas, from the Dordogne, who merely said to his neighbours, over a glass of *Bordeaux*, that “things had been better under the Old Regime and that he wanted a king.”<sup>77</sup> While in practice such cases were usually acquitted by local juries and judges,<sup>78</sup> in theory the law allowed for mere statements to be dealt with on the

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<sup>73</sup> A.P., vol.31, p. 330: Seconde partie, Titre 1<sup>er</sup>, Section 1<sup>re</sup>, Article 4.

<sup>74</sup> On the use of the *Code pénal* to prosecute cases of political justice, see Pierre Lascoumes, Pierrette Poncela and Pierre Lenoël, *Au nom de l'ordre: Une histoire politique du code pénal* (Paris, 1989), pp. 85-7, 251-2.

<sup>75</sup> A.P. vol.54, 4 décembre 1792, pp. 350-1.

<sup>76</sup> Decree of 4 décembre 1792, cited in A.P., vol.54, p. 351. My emphasis.

<sup>77</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L45-260, procès contre Bordas, pluviôse IV.

<sup>78</sup> The role of juries in moderating the application of severe laws will be discussed further below.



same level as if the speaker had led an armed attack on the National Convention.

By the early spring of 1793, France had been at war for nearly twelve months, and the accompanying shortages and hardships had begun to make themselves heard in the seditious statements of provincial citizens. The greatest period of anti-sedition legislation occurred during the six months from 10 March to 3 October 1793, and while some texts, such as the Law of Suspects of 17 September, targeted unspecified counter-revolutionary threats, many of the laws were passed in response to discouraging statements on specific topics. The law of 19 March 1793, for example, was put in place in order to calm the unrest which had rippled through the countryside since the promulgation of the *levée des 300,000 hommes* one month earlier. While the essence of the text focused upon the leaders and instigators of the open revolts which had occurred, and in fact closely resembled a declaration of martial law, considerable attention was also paid to the role which mere words might have played in the disruptions.<sup>79</sup> Article VI of the decree, like the clause from the penal code cited above, listed many serious crimes, but it was the reference to those who had “provoqué des attroupements” which would be cited in countless cases of seditious speech, carrying, as it did, the death penalty along with the other infractions cited. Nicolas Antoine Leclerc, *dit* Peymaud, for example, a former soldier from the commune of Montbos near Bergerac, was guillotined after being convicted of “propos tendants à empêcher les citoyens d’aller à la défense de la patrie, à ébranler leur fidélité envers la République, et à favoriser, par ce moyen, le progrès des armées ennemies sur son territoire.” His subversive statements, it turned out, had been directed at a group of volunteers, to whom Peymaud had said, “qu’ils étaient des foutues bêtes de partir pour aller se faire égorger, que pour lui, il préférerait qu’on lui coupât le col...”<sup>80</sup> The same law was cited in the trial of two wool-workers from a small herding village in the Ariège, accused of crying out in public that “il ne fallait pas partir, qu’il fallait se révolter.” Although 69 of the 80 witnesses to the incident denied having heard anything at all, and the municipality itself tried to argue that both defendants were habitual drunks, the case was forwarded to the *tribunal révolutionnaire* in Paris. As the public prosecutor of the departmental criminal court had reasoned, “...la simple provocation à la révolte, quoiqu’elle n’ait pas été effectuée, paraît être un délit qui compromet la sûreté intérieure

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<sup>79</sup> A.P. vol.60, pp. 331-2 and 347-8, 19-20 mars 1793.

<sup>80</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L42, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Nicolas Antoine Leclerc, *dit* Peymaud, ci-devant militaire, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires, avril 1793 - floréal II.



de l'état, dont l'accusation est réservée à l'Assemblée nationale..."<sup>81</sup>

The laws drafted in condemnation of dissatisfied remarks about the *assignats* provide another good example of the gravity, in the minds of the legislators, of verbal sedition. On 1 August 1793, in the midst of generalised disruption and hardship, Couthon argued before the National Convention: "...vos ennemis savaient bien que, pour vous détruire, c'étaient vos finances qu'il fallait attaquer, et qu'en les frappant, c'était au cœur de l'État qu'on portait un coup mortel." These enemies, Couthon continued, were "attacking" state finances by either refusing *assignats* in payment or accepting them only at highly disadvantageous exchange rates.<sup>82</sup> The National Convention passed an initial law prohibiting such *agiotage*, but the issue was raised again on 5 September. As proposed by Merlin de Douai, a spokesperson for the *Comité de Législation*, a more elaborate decree was passed, according to which

...toute personne prévenue d'avoir vendu ou acheté des assignats, d'avoir arrêté ou proposé différents prix d'après le paiement en numéraire ou en assignats, **d'avoir tenu des discours tendant à discréditer les assignats**, d'avoir refusé les assignats en paiement, [ou] de les avoir donnés ou reçus à une perte quelconque...

was to be arrested by local authorities and brought before the courts.<sup>83</sup> As with the laws against discouragement of recruitment, rural citizens were arrested under these laws for a variety of discontented and dissenting statements. Regardless of the seriousness of their crimes or the outcome of their trials, their cases show that revolutionary legislators had begun to think seriously about the effect which certain statements might have on public opinion.

Nonetheless, the existence of laws which forbade talk of a specific vein did not displace the growing body of more general legislation, which allowed anyone who spoke out against the government to be brought up on serious charges. During the reign of Terror, the oft-repeated exhortations to root out counter-revolutionary agents, and to disabuse those who had been led astray of their erroneous opinions, led to a greater vigilance against seditious remarks, and consequently, to a large number of trials. The fear that gripped all of France – that if one were not the accuser, he would become the accused

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<sup>81</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-7, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Giles Anel, peigneur de laine et Marcel Dedieu, cardeur de laine, pour provocation à la révolte, août 1793 - frimaire II. The W series of the A.N. (Tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris) contains no trace of the file, and the verdict is unknown.

<sup>82</sup> A.P. vol.70, 1<sup>er</sup> août 1793, p. 75. This type of reasoning was often echoed in the cases. See, for example, at the trial of Marguerite Cazes: "Le tribunal est pénétré de la gravité d'un pareil délit; il serait inutile de leur retracer le préjudice incalculable que cause aux intérêts de la société la dépréciation de la monnaie républicaine"; A.D. Ariège, 13L24-1, floréal IV.

<sup>83</sup> A.P. vol.73, 5 septembre 1793, pp. 406-7. My emphasis.



– penetrated into the smallest villages, leading to the denunciation of relatively harmless statements as though they had been intended to bring down the Republican government. While such trials were largely the product of an atmosphere of political crisis, they nonetheless left behind documents which allow historians to sample a wide variety of peasant political statements, statements which would have gone unrecorded had it not been for the political circumstances. In addition to existing laws – including the clauses of the *code pénal* and the law of 4 December 1792 – new pieces of legislation were used, including the decree of 27 March 1793, according to which *aristocrates* and other *ennemis de la Révolution* were declared *hors la loi*, and the vague crime of “provocation au rétablissement de la royauté” which was listed among the *tentatives contre-révolutionnaires* covered by the laws of 7-9 and 11 April 1793.<sup>84</sup> The infamous Law of Suspects of 17 September 1793 allowed even greater latitude in identifying potential enemies, as it included as “suspects” those who: “soit par leur conduite, soit par leurs relations, soit par leurs propos ou leurs écrits, s’annoncent partisans de la tyrannie et ennemis de la liberté.”<sup>85</sup> Judicial personnel avidly followed events at the revolutionary tribunal in Paris, and used judgements rendered there as precedents on which to base their own actions.<sup>86</sup> Often, however, the crimes of “propos contre-révolutionnaires” or of “propos séditieux” were simply understood as being of the utmost severity, and the citing of specific legal texts was not always required.

Although the events of 9 thermidor II certainly slowed the pace of seditious speech trials and calmed some of the fears which had led people to denounce their neighbours, the era which followed was by no means free of dissent, and the government’s fear of verbal opposition decreased remarkably little.<sup>87</sup> The containment of the conflict in the Vendée by November 1795 allowed the French army abroad to begin taking the offensive, marking the start of an era in which continuous warfare would sap both the strength and the good will of the provincial population. From 1794 to 1797, the revolutionary armies suffered heavily from desertion which reduced their total numbers by close to half, and the transient presence of deserters in the countryside added to the atmosphere of challenge, resentment

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<sup>84</sup> A.P. vol.61, pp. 397-8 and 500-3.

<sup>85</sup> A.P. vol.74, 17 septembre 1793, pp. 303-5. See also Royer, *Histoire de la justice*, pp. 394-5.

<sup>86</sup> The decree of 3 octobre 1793, for example, which described how various laws should be applied in cases where the defendant had also worn a white cockade, and which was cited by the departmental courts of the Ariège and the Dordogne as a law in its own right. A.P. vol. 75, pp.506-7.

<sup>87</sup> See, for this era, Jean Bourdon, “Le mécontentement public et les craintes des dirigeants sous le Directoire”, *A.h.R.f.*, 18 (1946), pp. 218-37.



and opposition.<sup>88</sup>

The authorities' fears of dissent were thus by no means unfounded, and the very real threat of a growing royalist opposition, particularly in the south-western region, led to an increased wariness of statements which seemed to herald royalist sentiment. While local authorities uncovered small pockets of opposition throughout the Directory era, it was the massive royalist insurrection wracking the countryside of the Haute-Garonne and the Ariège in the summer of 1799 which confirmed their earlier suspicions. In fact, a month before the rising, a man reported that he had been approached at the market in Toulouse by a peasant who had asked him to support the restoration of the monarchy. It is ironic that in this particular instance, the departmental administration dismissed the account as a wild accusation, because those caught in the uprising would, indeed, turn out to be rural day labourers and artisans, led by local elites.<sup>89</sup> In practice, however, as with the repression of the spontaneous comments described above and in chapter III, laws drafted in response to the threat of conspiracy on a grand scale were used to prosecute record numbers of drunken peasants who had shouted "vive le roi" with no intentions other than the momentary expression of frustration with the Republican regime. While the *code pénal* continued to be cited in the courts, the laws drafted during the 1793-94 era were no longer used; as a result, the main tool of political justice during the Directory became the *déclarations d'urgence* of 27-28 germinal IV, which targeted the "agents du royalisme et de l'anarchie."<sup>90</sup> While the second of these two laws focused upon counter-revolutionary infractions *par la voie de la presse*, the first law – that of 27 germinal – was an extensive piece of legislation, covering all manner of seditious words, activities, and gatherings. It was the first article of this law which was most often cited in cases of anti-governmental speech during this period:

Sont coupables de crime contre la sûreté intérieure de la République & contre la sûreté individuelle des citoyens, & seront punis de la peine de mort, conformément à l'article 612 du code des délits & des peines, tous ceux qui par leurs discours ou par leurs écrits imprimés, soit distribués, soit affichés, provoquent la dissolution de la Représentation nationale ou celle du Directoire exécutif...ou le rétablissement de la royauté, ou celui de la constitution de 1793, ou celui de la constitution de 1791, ou de tout gouvernement autre que celui établi par la constitution de l'an III, accepté

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<sup>88</sup> Jones, *Longman Companion*, pp. 145-6; Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters*, chapters 5 and 7. The question of the presence of deserters and other misplaced *étrangers* among suspected subversives will be addressed in greater detail later in this chapter.

<sup>89</sup> David Higgs, *Ultraroyalism in Toulouse from its Origins to the Revolution of 1830* (Baltimore, MD, 1973), pp. 44-5.

<sup>90</sup> A.D. Ariège, 1L134, Liasse de police.



par le Peuple français...<sup>91</sup>

Effectively, any political statement advocating, supporting, or even referring wistfully to, any previous regime was punishable by death. While few courts in the departments of the south-west ever handed down this sentence, particularly after the reinstatement of juries, the era in which the government controlled the communication of political ideas was far from over.

### The Culprits of Seditious Speech in the Countryside

Thus, the authorities' concern that seditious words could alter the peasantry's attachment to the Revolution is evident from their efforts to police and repress such words, as revealed in the legislative texts examined above. However, considering the nature of oral communication in rural society – as we saw in chapter I – it is clear that in spite of the elongated “arm” of the machine of the revolutionary government, only a tiny fraction of the seditious words spoken in the countryside would have ever reached the ears of the authorities. Moreover, as we saw in chapter III, members of non-peasant social groups, including parish priests, ex-nobles, and professionals such as notaries and salesmen, made up a greater proportion of the defendants in such cases than their relative numbers in rural society. On the one hand, it is only logical that the authorities be more attuned to the threat posed by these groups, as potential enemies of the new order, and that they accordingly target them in their search for dissenters. On the other hand, however, the government's priorities in their investigations reveal a great deal about their attitude concerning the communication of politics to the peasantry. If we are to clarify the process of rural politicization in the context of the French Revolution, then the uncovering of such attitudes is central to our understanding.

The assumptions of the deputies of the revolutionary assemblies regarding the political abilities of the rural population had their roots in generations of prejudice. Under the *ancien régime*, those who worked the land had been considered, at best, ignorant and simple-minded, and at worst, little more than animals: in the elite mind, they were “the very antithesis of culture”.<sup>92</sup> Illiterate manual labourers for the most part, the educated upper classes recoiled in horror at the thought of their barbaric lack of manners and living

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, loi du 27 germinal IV, article premier.

<sup>92</sup> Liana Vardi, “Imagining the Harvest in Early Modern Europe”, *American Historical Review*, 101 (1996), pp. 1357-97; citation, p. 1357.



conditions that were – even for the time – unhygienic; the phrases used to describe the rural population included “the masses”, “the rabble”, and even “the underworld”. This situation had begun to change during the eighteenth century, particularly with the influence of “enlightened” thinkers such as Louis de Jaucourt and the Baron d’Holbach.<sup>93</sup> Attitudes of either contempt or indifference were gradually replaced with grudging respect, as the *philosophes* painted a utopian, rustic picture of the good farmers who provided for the nation.<sup>94</sup> Liana Vardi has shown how this transformation was even mirrored in artistic representations of the harvest and of the countryside.<sup>95</sup> The uprisings and hardships of the seventeenth century had made the peasant “a threatening figure”, and the countryside “a place of yearning and unease, leaving “a cultural legacy of violence, one in which rural work could not be portrayed without arousing ire or dismay.” By the eighteenth century, however, a new view had been adopted:

As a laborer, [the peasant] was harmless and piteous and therefore a natural object of charity and paternalist concern. As an independent farmer, he was virtuous, hard-working, and devoted to his family. Anxious to learn and to be guided, the peasant emerged as a fitting citizen of the state.<sup>96</sup>

The authors of the eighteenth century, like the artists, saw promise in the rural population. While none advocated democracy or even mass education, preferring to keep the people in their place both socially and politically, their writings did much to rescue the rural population from a reputation for violence and ignorance, bestowing upon it a glow of usefulness and virtue.<sup>97</sup>

It was this cacophony of contradictory yet evolving attitudes which was the legacy of the eighteenth century, and which formed the basis for elite attitudes towards rural political abilities during the French Revolution. The bourgeois architects of the early Revolution saw themselves as the leaders of a crusade to educate the people: newspapers such as the *Feuille Villageoise* and the *Feuille du Cultivateur* targeted rural audiences, and urban Jacobin societies undertook massive campaigns of “civic education” directed at the countryside.<sup>98</sup> As one of the editors of the *Feuille Villageoise* wrote in 1791,

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<sup>93</sup> Louis de Jaucourt, Article “Peuple”, *Encyclopédie*, vol.12, p.475-47; Baron d’Holbach, *La Morale Universelle* (3 vols., Amsterdam, 1776), vol.2, pp. 250-1.

<sup>94</sup> Harry Payne, *The Philosophes and the People* (New Haven CT, 1976), pp. 1-17.

<sup>95</sup> Vardi, “Imagining”, p. 1358.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1397.

<sup>97</sup> See Payne, *The Philosophie*, and Harvey Chisick, *The Limits of Reform in the Enlightenment: Attitudes toward the Education of the Lower Classes in Eighteenth-century France* (Princeton NJ, 1981).

<sup>98</sup> Maciak, “Le rôle de la sociabilité révolutionnaire”.



Jetant un regard attentif sur la marche de la révolution, nous reconnûmes que pour la rendre heureuse, il fallait partout l'accompagner de lumières. Nous reconnûmes que ces lumières étaient loin encore du peuple des campagnes... Le bon sens est l'esprit du peuple... les désordres arrivés dans les villages n'avaient guère d'autre origine que l'ignorance. Le paysan avait reçu le mouvement de la liberté avant de recevoir ses principes.<sup>99</sup>

Indeed, the fact that the peasantry was seen as generally well-intentioned and wholesome, yet ignorant in matters of politics and easily led astray, largely explains why the authorities were so concerned that peasants might be "seduced" by seditious words spoken in the countryside.

From an early modern perspective, such assumptions are not unreasonable. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, it was commonly acknowledged that peasant uprisings were stirred up by local notables, and this model persisted into the revolutionary decade.<sup>100</sup> In the wake of the Great Fear, royal proclamations condemned the ill-intentioned individuals who had sown false rumours in the countryside in order to spread alarm. Wherever such individuals were found, one proclamation specified, copies of their interrogations and other parts of the investigation leading to their arrest were to be forwarded to the National Assembly; the government could then compare the evidence from different parts of the kingdom, and trace the events to their source, in order that "les chefs de ces complots soient soumis à des peines exemplaires qui répriment efficacement de pareils attentats."<sup>101</sup> Again, in September 1789, when news of peasants attacking local *châteaux* reached Versailles, their actions were attributed to the "false orders" which had supposedly been spread through the countryside "par des brigands et des gens sans aveu". In his Letter to the bishops and archbishops of the kingdom, Louis asked that his people, "renommé par la douceur de ses mœurs et de son caractère", be made aware of the

...pièges des méchants, afin qu'il rejette loin de lui comme des ennemis de la patrie, tous ceux qui voudraient l'induire à des actes de violence, tous ceux qui voudraient le détourner de payer sa part des charges publiques, et le priver ainsi de l'honorable qualité de citoyen de l'État.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Cited in Didier, "La Feuille Villageoise", p. 269.

<sup>100</sup> Indeed, such assumptions appear to have been part and parcel of contemporary discourses surrounding peasant uprisings. See Mousnier, *Peasant Uprisings*, chapter 2; Bercé, *History of Peasant Revolts*, pp.80-2, 115-8; the many significant contributions to Nicolas (ed.), *Mouvements populaires*, and, most recently Nicolas, *La Rébellion française*, pp.91-113, 271-3.

<sup>101</sup> A.N., AD+1089, Déclaration du Roi pour le rétablissement de l'ordre et de la tranquillité dans son Royaume, 14 août 1789.

<sup>102</sup> A.N., AD+1089, Lettre du Roi aux Archevêques et Evêques de son Royaume, 2 septembre 1789.



The same assumption of ignorance and helplessness appears again several months later, in the codification of martial law: in difficult times, the proclamation read, “les peuples...deviennent l’instrument d’intrigues qu’ils ignorent...”.<sup>103</sup> Further disorders in the spring of 1790, finally, were answered with a decree which placed blame with unidentified “brigands”, rather than with the “honnêtes gens,” invariably portrayed as the victims of the ill-intentioned.<sup>104</sup>

The fact that it was anti-constitutional parish priests who alerted the National Assembly to the dangers of sedition in the countryside has already been discussed at some length, as has the significance of the role of the *curés* in this matter as key rural intermediaries. However, even after the period of religious crisis, the members of the Paris assemblies continued to assume that dissent in the countryside was the work of clearly defined social groups, rather than the peasants themselves. The discussions which laid the groundwork for the law of 4 December 1792 leave no doubt as to its target: “il faut cette loi pénale”, Rewbell had argued, “pour réprimer l’audace de ceux qui osent imprimer que le peuple n’a plus qu’à recourir à une nouvelle insurrection ou qu’à se jeter dans les bras d’un nouveau tyran.”<sup>105</sup> The law of 19 March 1793, concerned with negative statements made during recruitment ceremonies, was aimed specifically at “les prêtres, les ci-devant nobles, les ci-devant seigneurs, les émigrés, et les agents et domestiques de toutes ces personnes,”<sup>106</sup> and the law of 27-28 germinal IV, as we have seen, targeted “les agents du royalisme et de l’anarchie”.<sup>107</sup> In every case, it was assumed not only that verbal dissent signalled a counter-revolutionary enterprise, but that this dissent could only come from the educated, traditional enemies of the new order. As keen propagandists themselves, the revolutionaries were aware that words could be a powerful weapon, and the traditional perception of peasants as childlike and unaware of the political sphere beyond the confines of the village made them seem an easy target. No local administrator or judge wanted his district to be the next Vendée; as one official put it, in an oft-repeated formula, “c’est par des propos semblables qu’on est parvenu à égarer le peuple dans plusieurs départements maintenant soumis et rentrés dans l’ordre.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> 21 octobre 1789, décret ordonnant la loi martiale.

<sup>104</sup> A.P. vol. 16, 2 juin 1790, p. 41.

<sup>105</sup> A.P. vol. 54, 4 décembre 1792, p. 350.

<sup>106</sup> A.P. vol. 60, 19 mars 1793, article 6, pp. 331-2.

<sup>107</sup> A.D. Ariège, 1L134, Liasse de police; loi du 27-28 germinal IV.

<sup>108</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L98-49 and 2L105-3, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Suzanne Guérineau, épouse d’Antoine St-George Debans, émigré, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires et pour avoir débité des nouvelles fausses ou exagérées, nivôse II.



In fact, so convinced were the deputies that the currents of seditious speech rippling through the countryside were the work of agents of the counter-revolution, that they came to wonder if it might not be part of a greater conspiracy against the Republic.<sup>109</sup> Considering that the peasantry made up more than four-fifths of the population of France, they reasoned that any group able to sway its mind, winning its allegiance and the strength of its numbers, would be in a position to dictate policy and politics. In addition to the parish priests, whose role as *porte-parole* of political news and information in the village would have made them effective conduits of sedition, the authorities were particularly concerned about the activities of ex-nobles, continuing to live out their existence in rural areas where they had previously commanded respect as knowledgeable, worldly individuals. St. Just, a defrocked priest living in the Lot-et-Garonne, was described as an “apostle of discord”; all those of his caste, the indictment read, “tendent un piège aux citoyens de bonne foi et dont les consciences sont faibles et pusillanimes, afin d’occasionner de trouble et de division parmi les habitants et d’anéantir les principes de la raison et du républicanisme...”<sup>110</sup> Joseph Duthiers, another *ci-devant* whom we met in chapter III, was also arrested in the Lot-et-Garonne, but for spreading false news and exaggerating the setbacks of the republican armies, reportedly in the hope of spreading discouragement about the viability of the new regime. The public prosecutor at the criminal court of the department appears to have been convinced that Duthiers’ words were part of a greater plot: he had chosen this part of the country to move about, the court was told, because it was here that he could be “most useful to his party”.<sup>111</sup>

For the most part, the local judiciary’s fears – that seditious words were a part of a great conspiracy to lead public opinion astray – appear to have been unfounded. First of all, no master plot was discovered within the confines of this sample, in spite of the fact that defendants were repeatedly asked to reveal the names of their fellow conspirators. More importantly, perhaps, a closer examination of the times and places in which the concept was most commonly voiced suggests that it was characteristic of the reports of local judges and investigators especially during the Terror, when not filling one’s quota of “local counter-revolutionary agents” was grounds for dismissal, if not worse, and thus indicates little more than a prudent use of the appropriate revolutionary rhetoric. Local

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<sup>109</sup> See, on this topic, Henri Wallon, *Histoire du tribunal révolutionnaire à Paris avec le journal de ses actes* (2 vols., Paris, 1880), vol. 1, pp. 130-45.

<sup>110</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-11, Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire, procès contre Joseph St. Just, *ci-devant* curé de Verteuil, pour propos et actes contre-révolutionnaires, pluviôse-germinal II.

<sup>111</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L98-28, procès contre Duthiers, frimaire II.



investigators, such as members of municipal councils and the *juges de paix* of the canton, brushed aside theories of conspiracy, and locally drawn juries used their powers to acquit the defendant, declaring that the words had been “without criminal intentions,” or that there was no evidence that a crime had been committed at all. While such a “paranoid style of politics”<sup>112</sup> is perhaps understandable in a context where there was, indeed, evidence of conspiracies at different levels, a more likely explanation lies, again, with urban elite assumptions of rural political immaturity. As Timothy Tackett has pointed out, in both the tradition of the social contract, in which the “general will” is right and everything else is illegal, and in the strength of the Jacobins’ conviction that they were right, dissent and popular opposition had to come, by definition, from outside of the people.<sup>113</sup> The architects of the Revolution fervently desired to believe that *le bon peuple* wholeheartedly supported their *oeuvre*; if they did not appear to do so, the argument went, they must have been led astray by an enemy.

In the same vein as the accusations against parish priests, other members of the rural elite were also carefully monitored. It was the high incidence of seditious statements from municipal officers, for example, which contributed to the rash of purges of local authorities conducted under the Terror. In one case, Ganivet, the mayor of a small village in the Dordogne, had spoken out against the economic sanctions of the revolutionary regime. Since his fellow villagers – peasants who were suffering from the effects of those sanctions – were “won over” to his point of view, Ganivet was accused of having “indoctrinated” them with his sedition.<sup>114</sup> In another village in the same area, a *bourgeois* named Gauthier was indicted for having remarked, over a glass of red wine, that he would kill his oxen before he would allow them to be worked on a holiday like the *fête de notre dame*, a comment which flew in the face of the imposition of the revolutionary calendar. In his trial, however, it was the innocence and impressionability of his audience which held the attention of the public prosecutor. Gauthier’s words, the court was told, were “more than enough to lead the inhabitants of the commune astray” and “maintain the fanatical prejudices” used by the enemies of the people in order to corrupt that mysterious element,

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<sup>112</sup> The expression is that of Gordon Wood, cited in Timothy Tackett, “Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution: French Elites and the Origins of the Terror, 1789-1792”, *American Historical Review*, 105 (2000), pp. 691-713; citation p. 695n19.

<sup>113</sup> Tackett, “Conspiracy Obsession”.

<sup>114</sup> *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), Tribunal révolutionnaire, procès contre Jean Ganivet, ci-devant maire de Chenaux, pour manoeuvres perfides tendant à empêcher la libre circulation des subsistances, floréal-pluviôse II.



“l’esprit public” and to bring about, if possible, a counter-Revolution in France.<sup>115</sup>

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the rural elite, those on the margins of rural society – *étrangers*, soldiers, pedlars, beggars and servants – were also closely monitored and were used as scapegoats in cases of seditious speech. The presence of “outsiders” in general – referring to anyone from further afield than the neighbouring villages – demanded increased vigilance. A decree was drawn up on 10 August 1789, in the wake of the Great Fear, according to which local officials were to draw up a list of ‘hommes sans aveu’ and disarm them, and after September 1793, any traveller who could not justify his existence with a paper document was liable to be arrested as a suspect.<sup>116</sup> Innkeepers were required to keep a register and note the details of their guests,<sup>117</sup> and fairgrounds were often portrayed, in police and administrative documents, as potential hotbeds in which the presence of *étrangers* might lead to the stirring up of new ideas and the spreading of sedition. During a series of grain riots in Paris in June 1793, the *conventionnel* Thuriot attributed the disorders, in part, to the influence of outsiders: “il y a des hommes arrivés de la Vendée, qui semblent n’avoir d’autre objet que d’exciter du mouvement. Dans les hôtels garnis, les étrangers crient aussi contre la révolution du 31 mai.”<sup>118</sup> Back in the provinces, when speech incidents occurred in public places, and particularly in taverns and inns, the presence of *étrangers* was frequently noted, often by their unusual dialects.<sup>119</sup> In one case that we first read about in chapter III, in which a

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<sup>115</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, procès contre Gauthier, *dit* Viroulet, germinal II.

<sup>116</sup> Loi des suspects, article II; A.P. vol.74, 17 septembre 1793, p. 304. The denomination of “gens suspects” had, in fact, existed since the *Code de police municipale et de police correctionnelle*, decreed on 19 July 1791. As specified in articles 1-3 of the first section, municipal bodies were to establish an annual *état des habitants*, for which each inhabitant would declare his name, age, place of birth, place of residence, profession, and other means of subsistence. Those who were unemployed but not unable to work would be considered “gens sans aveu”; those who refused to make a declaration were “gens suspects”, and those who were convicted of having made a false declaration were “gens malintentionnés”. Loi du 19 juillet 1791, A.P. vol. 28, pp. 425-33.

<sup>117</sup> While this law dates back to the medieval period, it was not often enforced except in times of uncertainty, inns which were not “sur la grande route” generally escaped notice, particularly since most innkeepers were illiterate. During the Revolution, however, the law was resurrected and included in the “Loi sur la police municipale et correctionnelle” of 19 juillet 1791 (titre I<sup>er</sup>, article 5), as part of a general increase in surveillance of movement (A.P., vol.28, p.426). In order to keep a watch on “undesirables” such as émigrés, deserters and vagabonds, the department of the Lot-et-Garonne issued a police circular in the Year IV drawing the attention of municipalities to the “registre à tenir dans les villes et dans les campagnes, par les aubergistes, maîtres de maisons garnies et logeurs, pour l’inscription des noms, prénoms, profession et domicile habituel, dates d’entrée et de sortie de tous ceux qui se coucheroient chez eux, même une seule nuit”. A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, L1016, Administration municipale du canton de Monflanquin, Police et mesures d’ordre public, 2 ventôse IV. On the early history of the law, see Michel and Fournier, *Histoire des hôtelleries*, vol. 1, p. 328; vol. 2, p. 387.

<sup>118</sup> A.P. vol.67, 27 juin 1793, p. 544.

<sup>119</sup> See, for example, Louis Dejean, who arrived at an inn in the Lot-et-Garonne “proférant un jargon inconnu”: A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L83-2, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Louis Dejean, tailleur d’habits, pour provocation à la royauté, messidor VII. In other cases, peasants remarked that people from further



group of young people were arrested for counter-revolutionary shouting and singing in a tavern in the Ariège, special note was taken of the fact that an *étranger*, unknown to the defendants and all of the witnesses, was present and engaged actively in the singing. After being repeatedly asked whether anyone had asked or bribed them to act as they had, the local boys were acquitted.<sup>120</sup>

In the same way, *militaires* who travelled either singly or in groups tended to attract official attention in public places, and their potentially disruptive influence was feared. Usually young in age, and yet more politicised than the average citizen due to their role in the defence of the Republic, soldiers repeatedly crop up in cases of seditious speech. In one case in the commune of Lalinde, near Bergerac in the Dordogne, five young men were arrested for disrupting the peace with their counter-revolutionary shouts and songs. Four of the five were from local regiments, and the group ranged in age from 18 to 27; “il nous a été dit que c’était des volontaires”, reported the municipal officer, and henceforth the case was treated with added circumspection.<sup>121</sup> Jean Meunier and Jean Denave, two *volontaires étrangers* passing through the town of Agen in the spring of 1793, were arrested for making disparaging comments about the war, the army, the government, and politics in general, much to the discontentment of local authorities. When informed of the incident, their commanding officer, writing from the *Camp des Trois Croix de l’Unité* in the Basses-Pyrénées, approved of the arrest, insisting that such behaviour was not typical of his regiment; as it transpired, they had been released on a *billet d’hôpital*, and their presence as far afield as Agen was rather suspicious.<sup>122</sup> In another trial, this time near Foix in the Ariège, it was two *volontaires* staying locally who had denounced their innkeeper and his companions as royalists. Everyone involved in the trial had found the two soldiers somewhat shifty, and when the accusation did not stand up in the courtroom, it was the innkeeper’s brother who provided a clue as to their motivations: when he had said to one of the soldiers, “Vous paraissez fatigué, citoyen,” the man had responded, “Oui, je le suis beaucoup, il me tarde que ceci soit fini; ce serait déjà fini sans les chouans de la Vendée.”<sup>123</sup> Indeed, numerous other groups were subject to the same prejudices. Pedlars and beggars were regarded with a wary eye, as transients

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afield spoke French to them, which they did not understand: see, for example, A.D. Ariège, 8L36-5, procès contre Roessard, brumaire II.

<sup>120</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d’autres, messidor an V-brumaire an VI.

<sup>121</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 25L36, procès contre Birol et d’autres, prairial IV.

<sup>122</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17-7 and 2L97-19, procès contre Meunier et Denave, août 1793.

<sup>123</sup> A.D. Ariège, 13L25-8, procès contre Benet, floréal-prairial IV.



of questionable means, and servants were invariably relegated to the edges of rural society, their positions with the wealthier members of the community both enviable and suspicious.

The members of each of these marginalised groups, and of the caste of “outsiders” in general, attracted more than their due share of attention as local authorities sought to place the blame for the seditious ideas circulating in the countryside elsewhere than with their own communities. In the market town of Villeneuve-sur-Lot, in the Lot-et-Garonne, a police officer named Henri Landié was making his rounds one morning when he saw a series of “placards alarmants et provocateurs contre le bon ordre” posted up around the public square.<sup>124</sup> As Landié reported to his superiors later that day, “les mauvais effets de ces placards ne peuvent être plus dangereux, qu’ils agitent les citoyens en sens opposé au nom sacré de la liberté et de la constitution de l’an III.” The *commissaire* of the municipal council, in a speech recorded in the minutes of the meeting, intoned:

...le placard dénoncé n’a pu être affiché que par des étrangers qui se rendent à la foire d’Agen, et dont le passage dans cette commune pendant la nuit a favorisé la coupable entreprise. Je crains que parmi nos concitoyens amis ardents de la liberté, de la constitution de l’an III et du gouvernement, mais faciles à égarer, il ne se soit glissé quelque ennemi secret de l’ordre et de la paix intérieure. Je vous invite à une continuelle recherche de ce fait, l’un des plus nécessaires à connaître.<sup>125</sup>

Not surprisingly, his envoys failed to ensnare the guilty party. Transients such as beggars also attracted unwanted attention, particularly when they were found discussing *les affaires du temps*. Pierre Chaussonnel, the unemployed *scieur de long* travelling through the south-west begging for his bread whom we met in the introduction, was in the habit of passing on news wherever he stopped. However, when his reports regarding the reopening of churches came to local authorities’ attention, he was quickly arrested and detained as a suspect.<sup>126</sup> Pierre Grelety, the *instituteur* we met earlier, found himself in a similar situation: he was accused by the municipality of Bergerac of travelling from place to place, with the sole intention of “disseminer partout ses discours incendiaires.”<sup>127</sup>

While local administrators and judicial personnel seemed content to have foiled the projects of priests, ex-nobles, and other undesirables, they were at slightly more of a loss when it appeared that it had, in fact, been local peasants and artisans making the

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<sup>124</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L271-105 dossier 2, Tribunal correctionnel de l’arrondissement de Villeneuve, procès contre les quidams qui ont affiché des placards séditionnels, 2<sup>e</sup> sans-culottide V - vendémiaire VI.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, Délibérations de l’administration municipale du canton de Villeneuve-sur-Lot, 2<sup>e</sup> sans-culottide V.

<sup>126</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-6 and 2L98-23, procès contre Chaussonnel, floréal II.

<sup>127</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L57-489, procès contre Grelety, fructidor VII.



objectionable statements, a situation which became more common after the first few years of the Revolution. In a sample of nearly 200 investigations into incidents of seditious speech, 40% of those accused were what we might call “intermediaries” – parish priests, ex-nobles, notaries, and the local large landowners and municipal council members – and were therefore seen as potential subversives. However, of equal significance is the fact that the remaining 60% of defendants were *not* intermediaries. Rural artisans, sharecroppers, day-labourers and the like made up the majority of the defendants, particularly towards the end of the revolutionary decade. Nevertheless, even when the prosecuting authorities could not avoid conceding that seditious statements had in fact been made by peasants, there is evidence of a marked reluctance to admit the possibility that they had done so independently. As one departmental judge pontificated,

...ce n'est pas surtout dans l'esprit et dans le cœur des laboureurs paisibles que germent et que naissent les projets contre-révolutionnaires; le peu de temps que l'assiduité de leurs pénibles travaux leur permet de donner à la connaissance des affaires peuvent bien les livrer à quelques instants d'erreur et d'égarement, mais que ce n'est pas dans la douceur et dans l'innocence de la vie champêtre que se méditent et se forment les conspirations contre la liberté et la souveraineté du peuple...<sup>128</sup>

As a result of this sort of thinking, revolutionary authorities dealt with the seemingly incomprehensible reality of peasants making anti-governmental statements in public by continuing to maintain that more educated individuals were at the root of the problem.

While it would be incorrect to say that rural labourers from the agricultural and artisanal sectors were never convicted of incidents of seditious speech, such convictions occurred in only a small minority of cases. Moreover, they appear to have been a last resort, used in cases where the cold-blooded intentions of the defendant were so blatant that they could not be ignored or explained away by *circonstances atténuantes*. Before arriving at a conviction, investigating authorities very often asked rural defendants to reveal the identity of the individual who told or bribed them to speak in such a manner. The tone of this questioning varied: at times the interrogation records seem merely to suggest, as a matter of routine, the possibility of an outside influence. In the case described earlier, for example, of the drunken singing-session in the Ariège from which various seditious shouts rang clear, each young man was asked in turn whether anyone had attempted to turn him against the current government “par des dons, promesses, sollicitations, invitations, largesses et profusions, craintes, [ou] menaces.”<sup>129</sup> At other

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<sup>128</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L98-35, procès contre Dasti, germinal II.

<sup>129</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d'autres, messidor V-brumaire VI.



times, however, the existence of a subversive individual was taken for granted by the questioner, who saw his only remaining task to be the discovery of the agent's identity. One defiant artisan who, during a municipal ceremony, had volunteered an innovative suggestion for how the government should be run, was told that it was only by revealing "who had advised or otherwise incited him to speak out" that he would lessen the gravity of his own crime. As it turned out, he was, indeed, a spokesperson – but for a group of like-minded villagers who were too afraid to voice their own opinions.<sup>130</sup>

Even if the defendant's misdemeanour could not be attributed to an agent of the counter-revolution standing in the shadows, there was a tendency for revolutionary courts to look the other way, rather than to hand out potentially heavy sentences, when it appeared clear that nothing truly subversive had taken place. An overwhelming number of cases, for example, were dismissed for cause of inebriation: defendants routinely escaped punishment with the excuse that they had been drunk (usually "pris de vin", "dans le vin", or even "plein de vin") at the time, and had not meant to say the words of which they were accused. A typical example is that of Louis Dejean, a thirty-three year old tailor who had loudly announced, in a tavern in the village of Ladignac, in the Lot-et-Garonne, "que dans peu nous aurions un roi." Dejean was arrested as a *provocateur à la royauté*, but when interrogated, he insisted that he had been drinking and had no recollection of the incident. The situation was the same with another defendant whom we have already met: Jean Casse, *dit* Lartigue, a 40-year-old *agriculteur* who was found decrying the Republican regime to the tune of several bottles of wine.<sup>131</sup> Although it turned out that Lartigue was quite genuinely upset, as several of his mules had been requisitioned by the Republic, he was easily acquitted. In cases in which the defendants did not actually pose a danger to the internal security of the state, the collusion of both jury and village witnesses to keep zealous urban revolutionaries from interfering in local affairs invariably resulted in an acquittal. In this way, rural citizens were able to use the prejudices and assumptions of the authorities to their advantage, encouraging them to accept any explanation as more likely than day-labourers and shepherds holding political views.

### The Courts and the Prosecution of Verbal Dissent

Thus, the authorities were aiming to prevent opposition on a large scale, and even

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<sup>130</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L45-260, procès contre Bordas, pluviôse IV.

<sup>131</sup> A.D. Ariège, 13L24-8, procès contre Casse, *dit* Lartigue, prairial IV.



conspiracy, as revealed by both their legislation and the social groups on whom they focused their investigations. These priorities were not wholly invalid: a considerable number of cases did occur among the *ci-devant* privileged classes and the rural elite, for having made statements which, while not necessarily heralding an armed revolt, certainly indicated a desire for the current order to change. However, for the bulk of cases represented in this sample, I do not believe that the suspicions of government officials were warranted by the facts. What the regime did have on its hands, rather, was a rural population which was perfectly capable of understanding political stances from different sources, and which very often voiced its own dissatisfaction. In the next chapter, we will examine the intersection between official and unofficial sources of political information in the countryside, and consider what both the indicted statements and the testimonies of witnesses can tell us about the formation of public opinion. Before we leave the examination of these records “from above”, however, let us first re-examine the attitudes of the authorities towards these more rural cases, to glean from them what – at the village level – the authorities thought important to repress.

As administrators and judiciary alike adjusted their thinking to take into account evidence that seditious words could come from within the village as well as from outside it, the social profile of the defendants accused of counter-revolutionary speech became increasingly rural. While provincial criminal courts were not, as we have seen, especially keen to prosecute such incidents to the full letter of the law, trials ending in acquittals still tell us a great deal about what the government and local judiciary thought was important when dealing with verbal sedition. In this final section, we will review the cases in the sample through the lens of the three main criteria according to which the defendants were judged: the distinction between words and actions, the degree of publicity with which a statement was made, and finally, the intention with which the words had been spoken. First, however, in order to set the stage for the study of the courts’ criteria, we need to acquaint ourselves with the individuals who made the decisions.

### Criminal courts in revolutionary France

The Revolution of 1789 brought many significant and far-reaching changes to the *ancien régime* system of justice.<sup>132</sup> From the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen*,

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<sup>132</sup> On the justice system of the *ancien régime*, see Godechot, *Les Institutions*, pp. 139-42; Woloch, *The New Regime*, pp. 297-302 and 355-6; and Royer, *Histoire de la justice*, part I; on justice in the provinces, see works cited above, note 49.



which vowed to safeguard individual rights and freedoms, to the complete rationalization of the entire structure of the judicial sector, the revolutionaries fulfilled the Enlightenment project of making justice both accessible and reasonable.<sup>133</sup> Overlapping seigneurial and royal jurisdictions, as well as regional variations, were replaced with a regular hierarchy of judicial institutions identical in each and every department of the nation, and justice was, in principle, free of charge and available to all. Civil justice was characterised by an emphasis on arbitration: most disputes were resolved by locally elected *arbitres* and, especially, *juges de paix*, with only more serious charges and unresolved cases being sent on to district courts.<sup>134</sup> Correctional, or police justice was handled at two levels: minor infractions were resolved by the municipality, whereas more serious crimes – including crimes against morality, disruption of public worship, insults and interpersonal violence, manslaughter, affront to public authority, begging, and vagrancy – were dealt with by the *juge de paix*.<sup>135</sup> In the criminal justice system, investigations were transferred by the *juge de paix* to the district court, where a decision was made as to whether or not to proceed to the criminal court, established in the *chef-lieu* of each department. The practice of criminal justice also saw one of the greatest changes made during the Revolution: the institution of the *jury de jugement*, which will be discussed in more detail below. Finally, as venality of office had been abolished, all judicial personnel were elected: *juges de paix* for two years, from the same pool as those who made up the district and departmental administrations, and district court judges for six years, from all judges and magistrates over thirty years of age and with at least five years' experience. Judges for the criminal courts were taken from among the district court judges on a rotating basis.<sup>136</sup>

The new criminal procedure established by the Constituent Assembly was, in many ways, what we might expect today. Accusations came either from private citizens or from general rumour – thus we often find individuals denounced “par la voix

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<sup>133</sup> Among the most vocal on this topic were Montesquieu, in *De L'Esprit des Lois*; Beccaria, in *Des délits et des peines*; and Voltaire, with respect to the Calas case. See Godechot, *Les Institutions*, p. 140.

<sup>134</sup> While general changes and changes to civil justice were largely instituted by the law of 16-24 August 1790, the changes to the criminal justice system had to await the law of 16 September 1791 and the promulgation of the *Code pénal* on 25 September 1791.

<sup>135</sup> Godechot, *Les Institutions*, pp. 148-50. The institution of the *juges de paix* was a truly remarkable phenomenon, and the key aspect of the judicial reforms which made the new system accessible to all. Their papers, while notoriously problematic to read, offer a wealth of observations not only on rural crime, but also on the day-to-day functioning of rural society. Although the institution is somewhat understudied, historians have recently begun braving its depths: see Crubaugh, *Balancing the Scales*; Reinhardt, *Justice in the Sarladais*; Dumas, “Justice et Révolution en Val-de-Marne”; and Claude Coquard and Claude Durand-Coquard, “La justice de paix, un pouvoir local nouveau: éléments de recherche à travers l'exemple de deux cantons de l'Allier”, in Dupuy (ed.), *Pouvoir local et Révolution*, pp. 295-324.

<sup>136</sup> Godechot, *Les Institutions*, pp. 146-8 and 150.



publique”<sup>137</sup> – but the responsibility for finding the accused person lay with the *gendarmerie*. Once located, the suspect would be arrested on a *mandat d’arrêt* or a *mandat d’amener*, interrogated by the *juge de paix*, and incarcerated in the district prison. At this point, a preliminary procedure would take place at the district court. The file would first be examined by a *directeur du jury*, selected from among the district court judges, who would choose to either dismiss the case if, for example, evidence was lacking, or else to send it before a *jury d’accusation*.<sup>138</sup> If the *jury d’accusation* decided the case should be pursued, it would then be sent before the criminal court. Typically, on the day of the trial, the *acte d’accusation*, or indictment, would be read out by a clerk, to be followed by an interrogation of the defendant by the *président* and the testimonies of witnesses, with the defendant having the right to comment on the latter. The closing speech would then be given by the public prosecutor, and it is from this and the summary given afterwards by the *président* that we obtain the clearest statements of the position of the authorities on a given indictment.<sup>139</sup> The verdict would rest with the *jury de jugement*, when one was used, from which a majority of ten out of twelve jurors, would be required for a conviction; the sentence, in the case of a conviction, would be announced after deliberation among the judges. The procedure remained relatively constant throughout the revolutionary era, with the notable exception of the Terror, during which some criminal courts were given the ability to judge *révolutionnairement* – that is, with the same powers of jurisdiction as the *tribunal révolutionnaire* in Paris – although even in these circumstances, the jury was sometimes retained.<sup>140</sup> The Directory era, finally, saw some minor changes in the election of judicial personnel and the location of the preliminary procedure: with district-level administrations abolished under the constitution of the Year III, the initial appraisal of criminal cases was carried out at the correctional courts in the *chef-lieux des arrondissements*.

Considering that the newly-erected hierarchy of judicial institutions had to deal

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<sup>137</sup> The significance of this phenomenon will be dealt with in more detail in chapter V.

<sup>138</sup> The members of the *jury d’accusation* were chosen from a list of 200 active citizens drawn up by *procureur général syndic* of the department. It was the *jury de jugement*, a group of twelve chosen in the same manner as the *jury d’accusation*, which sat in judgement at a criminal trial. A full complement of criminal court personnel would include, in addition to the jury, the president, the public prosecutor (elected in the same manner as the judges and generally the moderator of the trial), the judges (taken by turns from district courts), the *greffier*, and the *commissaire du roi*, who requested the sentencing. The functioning and significance of the jury will be discussed further below.

<sup>139</sup> See Woloch, *The New Regime*, pp. 359-61, and Howard Brown, *Ending the French Revolution: Violence, Justice and Repression, 1795-1802* (forthcoming, 2003), chapter 5; text obtained through personal communication with the author and cited with permission.

<sup>140</sup> Godechot, *Les Institutions*, p. 383.



with a major turnover in personnel, as well as a body of legislation that had almost completely changed overnight, the level of competence and of organisation are, in general, quite impressive. What is nonetheless clear from the documentation, however, is a certain hesitation when dealing with political crimes, which would have been virtually unknown in the countryside prior to the Revolution. The *directeur du jury* of the district court at Nontron, in the Dordogne, wrestled openly with this new type of crime in his petition to the *accusateur public* of the criminal court:

Le procureur de la commune... est venu me dénoncer des délits, non de ceux qui attaquent la vie, la réputation ou la fortune d'un citoyen, non de ceux commis contre une commune, mais de ceux qui attaquent la Constitution...<sup>141</sup>

The perceived importance of rooting out dissent and punishing would-be seditionaries led very early, as we have seen, to a series of decrees aimed at vague crimes such as *lèse-nation* and "the shaking of public confidence in the government". Faced with the complete reorganization of both institution and personnel, local judicial authorities tended to send on any cases which carried even a whiff of actual sedition, effectively freeing their hands for other tasks and putting the ball back in the court of the deputies who had thought such laws necessary.

As the Revolution wore on and the number of political crimes on the books increased, local courts again hesitated in their application, with the most awkward cases being passed like hot potatoes from *juge de paix* to district court to criminal court, and often on to Paris. Before the erection of the *tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris*, problematic cases were simply sent "à la Convention nationale", revealing a local reticence to be held responsible for cases which were potentially dangerous to the internal security of the state.<sup>142</sup> The establishment of the Paris court on 10 March 1793 effectively relieved provincial criminal courts of this responsibility,<sup>143</sup> but even though certain departments, including the Dordogne, the Lot-et-Garonne, and the Haute-Garonne, were given the right to judge *révolutionnairement* by passing representatives-on-mission, local judges

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<sup>141</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 19L75, procès contre Guraboeuf, mars-avril 1791.

<sup>142</sup> See, for example, the case against the sieurs Madillac, Dussol, Pommier, *et autres*, habitants de Mussidan, accusés d'avoir tenu des propos séditieux et commis des actes de violence, which was sent "à l'Assemblée nationale". A.D. Dordogne, B834, Sénéchaussée et présidiale de Périgueux, octobre 1789.

<sup>143</sup> According to the law of 10 March 1793, the *tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris* was set up to judge "toute entreprise contre-révolutionnaire, tout attentat contre la liberté, l'égalité, l'unité, l'indivisibilité de la république, tout attentat contre la sûreté intérieure et extérieure de l'État, tout complot tendant à rétablir la royauté ou à établir tout autre autorité attentatoire à la liberté, à l'égalité et à la souveraineté du peuple." A.P. vol.60, p. 65, 10 mars 1793.



continued to plead incompetence, sending on a considerable number of cases.<sup>144</sup> At the criminal and revolutionary court of the department of the Dordogne in Périgueux, the public prosecutor, after having listed all the verbal infractions of a certain Jean Fournier, *dit Carré, cultivateur*, concluded:

Que tous ces propos sont bien évidemment contre-révolutionnaires [...] mais qu'aucune loi n'ayant attribué la connaissance de ces délits aux tribunaux criminels ordinaires, le présent tribunal ne pourrait point en connaître...<sup>145</sup>

The case was, indeed, sent on to Paris; the different elements of the file were examined, and Carré, a humble but disgruntled peasant from the village of Gardonne, was interrogated in the presence of Fouquier-Tinville himself, who decided that his words, while seditious, were not about to bring down the government, and pronounced an acquittal.<sup>146</sup> In another case, this one remaining in the department, the *accusateur public* debated the issues at length, unsure of what to do. While the laws did give him certain competencies where cases of counter-revolutionary words were concerned, the denunciations against the accused, a young medical officer named Louis Sclafer whom we met in chapter III, were questionable, having come from only two individuals, and the question of their validity made the *accusateur public* reluctant.

Ce n'est pas que l'intérêt de la République n'exige bien qu'on prenne les mesures les plus actives et les plus sévères envers ceux qui sont prévenus d'y attenter, et qu'on ne doive bien examiner avec le plus grand scrupule, les dénonciations portées contre eux, mais le moyen de pourvoir au salut de la république est-il d'incarcérer sur de simples dénonciations et de faire traduire des prévenus devant les tribunaux, et surtout devant le tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris, que la multitude des affaires porte à des lenteurs considérables, sur beaucoup de celles qui lui sont envoyées de tous les points de la République? C'est, nous osons le dire, violer tous les principes de la législation criminelle, même en temps de révolution...<sup>147</sup>

In the end, he only wrote to the Paris court for advice, reasoning that it was unlikely that sending the defendant himself would allow the court there to unearth any new information, and that since he wasn't even sure a serious crime had been committed, it would be ridiculous to go to the expense. There is no indication in the archives of the *tribunal révolutionnaire* that his letter was read, but this would not have been unusual for cases

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<sup>144</sup> On the Dordogne, see *Le Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne sous la Terreur* (2 vols., Périgueux, 1880), vol. 1, introduction. On the Lot-et-Garonne, see Charles Cambon, "La justice révolutionnaire à Agen, 1793-1794", *Revue de l'Agenais*, 59 (1932), pp. 280-9, and 60 (1933), pp. 115-36. On the Haute-Garonne, finally, see Jean-Marie Luc, "Le Tribunal criminel de la Haute-Garonne", *A.h.R.f.*, 37 (1965), pp. 332-43.

<sup>145</sup> *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), vol. 2, pp. 113-4, procès contre Fournier, *dit Carré*, germinal-prairial II.

<sup>146</sup> A.N. W 420 dossier 955, Tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris, procès contre Fournier, *dit Carré*, cultivateur, prairial II.

<sup>147</sup> A.D. Dordogne 24L39, procès contre Sclafer, frimaire-nivôse II.



forwarded from the provinces. Of the fifteen cases from this sample which were sent on to Paris,<sup>148</sup> ten appear to have been judged by the ultimate court of the Terror, and only three of these - including just one case involving peasants - were sentenced to the guillotine.<sup>149</sup>

While the public prosecutor's concerns are certainly understandable, this kind of hesitation in applying harsh laws to cases of village malcontents might also be symptomatic of a larger phenomenon, namely the tendency of provincial courts to act in favour of local defendants in their application of laws against political crime.<sup>150</sup> Local courts were staffed with personnel drawn from the local population, which meant that in the interpretation of Parisian legislation, often seen as draconian, interfering and out of touch with rural society, it was not unlikely that the prosecutors would sympathise primarily with the defendant. In the tiny hamlet of Taurignan-Vieux in the Ariège, two wool-workers had been accused of "provocation à la révolte" for their statements made during the recruitment assembly, in a case first introduced earlier in the chapter. In compiling the *procès-verbal*, however, the municipal council argued that while it was true that "de pareils outrages faits à la loi... pourraient devenir funestes à la chose publique", the defendants were innocent of any true crime:

Si les lois nous dictent de toute part qu'il vaut mieux absoudre un criminel que de condamner un innocent, celles de la nature et de la raison nous dictent que l'innocent ne doit jamais périr; or, tels sont Giles Anel et Marcel Dedieu, puisqu'ils n'ont pas violé la loi, et s'ils avaient pu le faire, leur crime n'est pas dans leur cœur, parce [qu'ils] n'ont jamais été entachés ni de fanatisme, ni de royalisme, ni de fédéralisme, mais qu'au contraire, ils ont toujours montré des sentiments révolutionnaires; que leur conduite n'a paru jusqu'ici suspecte à personne... d'après tant de faits [nous voulons] que l'humanité et la justice s'intéressent au sort des prévenus, que notre voix secourable se fasse entendre jusqu'au pied des tribunaux, et que la dénonciation...soit regardée comme l'effet d'un zèle patriotique...<sup>151</sup>

The criminal court in Foix was sensible to these arguments, and the defendants were eventually acquitted.

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<sup>148</sup> The fifteen cases referred to Paris represent approximately one-fifth of the trials in the sample which were judged during the period of existence of the *tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris*.

<sup>149</sup> The one case in question was that of Léonard Meynard and his sister, Paule, from the village of Romain-sur-Colle, in the Dordogne, both described as *cultivateurs*. The Meynards were accused of having torn a decree from the hands of the mayor as he tried to read it, and then attempting to stir up the people with their statements of frustration and disgust, and they were both guillotined in Paris on 29 messidor II. While this case represents, perhaps, what the authorities were looking for, it is far and away the exception among trials for seditious speech in rural areas. A.N. W 420-955, Tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris.

<sup>150</sup> Of the 14,000 victims of the Terror, across France, for whom the social identity is recorded, a considerable 28% were peasants; nonetheless, the vast majority of these cases were from the west. See Donald Greer, *The Incidence of the Terror during the French Revolution; A Statistical Interpretation* (Gloucester, Mass., 1966), esp. totals on p. 163.

<sup>151</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-7, procès contre Anel et Dedieu, délibération de la commune de Taurignan-Vieux, 2 septembre 1793.



The tendency for local authorities to acquit rural defendants is nowhere more visible than in the activities of the *jury de jugement*.<sup>152</sup> As discussed above, the important role assigned to the jury in deciding a defendant's fate was a new addition in 1791: one which had a notable effect on how Parisian laws were applied in the countryside. In the sample used here, of 42 cases decided by jury, only five resulted in a conviction, an acquittal rate of nearly 90%.<sup>153</sup> While the functioning of juries in this early period of their institution has generally been neglected, those historians who have studied the phenomenon report a similar tendency of indulgence. Richard Cobb, Colin Lucas, and Charles Doyle, working on the reactionary south-east, have attributed this leniency to the fact that criminal courts in that region were run primarily by counter-revolutionaries and royalists, who used political cases as a platform from which to make their opposition known.<sup>154</sup> Robert Allen, however, in his preliminary study of political trials in the Côte-d'Or, argues that the high acquittal rate in political cases judged by jury was an even more general phenomenon, extending to departments which "approximated the 'ordinary' side of provincial life in the 1790s...undisturbed by widespread and violent opposition to the revolutionary government."<sup>155</sup> Apart from the brief royalist insurrection of the Year VII, the south-western departments studied here come closer, in political tendency, to Allen's description of the Côte-d'Or than to the reactionary south-east, and as such, my findings of juries determined to protect boisterous but otherwise harmless peasants from the guillotine corroborate his hypothesis. Nonetheless, even the juries had to consider the motive of the defendant, as well as the potential damage of his words, and thus it is with the intention of better understanding these acquittals, as well as the smaller number of convictions, that we move on to examine their criteria.

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<sup>152</sup> On the functioning of the *jury de jugement*, see Royer, *Histoire de la justice*, pp. 291-300 and 379-81; Seligman, *Justice en France*, vol.1, pp. 460-3; Godechot, *Les Institutions*, pp. 151-2, 478; James M. Donovan, "Magistrates and Juries in France, 1791-1952", *French Historical Studies*, 22 (1999), pp. 379-420; Isser Woloch, "'Le Palladium de la liberté': Vicissitudes du juré criminel", in *L'Image de la Révolution française*, Congrès de la Sorbonne, 6-12 juillet 1989 (Paris/New York, 1990), vol.2, pp. 983-8, and *The New Regime*, chapter XII; Robert Allen, "Political Trials by Jury in the Côte-d'Or, 1792-1800", *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the W.S.F.H.*, 18 (1991), pp. 222-32; and, on the later period, Brown, *Ending the French Revolution*.

<sup>153</sup> Compared with the sources cited below and the summary presented by Woloch (*The New Regime*, p.368), this figure is quite high. This is likely due to the criteria used in assembling the sample; trials were sought which were both rural in character and primarily concerned with verbal incidents, two factors which arguably led to acquittals in local courts.

<sup>154</sup> Cobb, *Reactions*, pp. 48-51, and, in notes, pp. 243-9; Colin Lucas, "The First Directory and the Rule of Law", *French Historical Studies*, 10 (1977), pp. 231-60; and Charles Doyle, "The Judicial Reaction in South-Eastern France, 1794-1800", Unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1986.

<sup>155</sup> Allen, "Political Trials by Jury", p. 223.



### Words vs. actions

In considering the way in which sedition was treated in provincial courts during the Revolution, one of the first distinctions to be made is the relative importance of verbal crime, in the minds of local judges, in comparison with crimes of actual violent resistance and rebellion. As we have seen, the concept of "sedition" in the eighteenth century was not to be confused with *lèse-majesté verbale*; *sédition* usually referred to concrete acts of resistance and revolt against the state, and was more commonly associated with *émotions* and *mouvements populaires*. It was only gradually that peoples' words came to be monitored in the same way as their activities, and this phenomenon was even slower to spread in the rural sector than it was in an urban context. Local courts appear to have had some conceptual difficulties in dealing with verbal crime, and in this context, crimes of violent revolt and physical resistance were more tangible, more definable, more understandable and easier to prosecute. Ultimately, damage to public opinion, while serious and worrisome, particularly in modern times, is slow, stealthy, and cannot immediately be detected; damage to a municipal officer or his property produces more concrete evidence. It is this type of reasoning which was evident in the decisions and actions of provincial courts, and which greatly affected how crimes of words were judged.

However, the issue of "words versus actions" is not so black and white as it might at first seem; for verbal crimes were almost invariably prosecuted not for the principles for which they stood, but for their possible effect on listeners. Unlike the crime of heresy, in which words were merely indicative of an unlawful state of mind, it was not illegal to hold a counter-revolutionary opinion during the French Revolution. The right to freedom of opinion was guaranteed by the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, but the conditions placed upon this freedom are clear: "Nul ne peut être inquiété pour ses opinions, même religieuses," the *Déclaration* specifies, "pourvu que leur manifestation ne trouble pas l'ordre public établi par la loi." Although the legislation against seditious speech became increasingly indulgent towards cases in which the offence had been solely verbal, the texts were nonetheless phrased so that it was clearly the disruptive potential of the words, rather than the words themselves, which was the crime. In each of the laws used to prosecute incidents of seditious speech, it was the potential result which was highlighted: it was illegal to speak words "which shake the faith of the people in the nation", as well as words "which tend to discredit the *assignats*" and words "which suggest or provoke the re-establishment of the monarchy". The assumption, in each case, is that if the words had their full effect, the faith of the people in the nation *would* be



shaken, the *assignats* would be discredited, and the monarchy would be re-established. The only exception to this observation is the relatively short-lived Law of Suspects, according to which people's words could reveal them to be "partisans de la tyrannie et ennemis de la liberté". However, people were not guillotined for being suspects - they were simply detained, in case such words *did* have a pernicious effect.

Thus, actions were, indeed, taken more seriously than words. This is quite understandable: municipal and police authorities were operating in a context in which the populace was not yet accustomed to voicing its discontent in a peaceful, democratic way. With a collective memory of generations of rural revolts and the recent experience of the Great Fear and rural disturbances throughout the south-west in 1789 and 1790, authorities were genuinely concerned that strongly voiced counter-revolutionary statements could lead the people to protest in a violent manner. The image of the murmuring crowd was a threatening one, even to the rural elite who found themselves in positions of mayor, *juge de paix* and officers of the National Guard. Objections voiced during meetings and assemblies, in particular, were worrisome. In one village in the Dordogne, a peasant walked out during an assembly for the reading of the laws, leaving the other inhabitants with a powerful statement: "sorte qui voudra", he said angrily, "pour moi, je sais assez." Although there followed numerous mutterings and comments on the situation, the assembly remained calm; in their report, however, the municipal officers wrote fearfully that the man had given "le signal de rébellion".<sup>156</sup> A similar fear can be sensed in the case against Olivier Roessard, a peasant from the Ariège who was upset about the removal of religious symbols. When the *commissaires civils* based in the nearby town of St-Girons reported Roessard's words, it was the fact that he had threatened to "faire battre la caisse et se lever tous pour s'y opposer" that concerned them the most: they were, after all, townsfolk who could only too easily imagine themselves the victims of an attack from the surrounding countryside.<sup>157</sup> The frequent recurrence of phrases such as "incitation à la désobéissance des lois", "tendre à soulever le peuple" and "provoquer le désordre et l'alarme" throughout the sample clearly betrays an underlying fear, among urban judicial and administrative personnel, of the ultimately insurrectionary force of mere words.

Naturally, the government reacted more strongly to seditious words in periods when there had been an atmosphere of violence or disruption in the region. When a soldier

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<sup>156</sup> A.N. W420-955, Tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris, procès contre Léonard Meynard, cultivateur, et Paule Meynard, sa soeur, pour incitation à soulèvement, messidor II. See footnote 149, above, for further information on the circumstances and outcome of the trial.

<sup>157</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-5, procès contre Roessard, brumaire II.



named Lachapelle was interrogated for having placarded the public square with seditious notices, the minutes of his interrogation read that the municipality feared “qu’elle serait infiniment coupable si elle ne prenait des mesures pour arrêter et prévenir les troubles qu’on tente de susciter depuis longtemps dans ce canton”.<sup>158</sup> The situation with Roessard, above, was the same: “ces propos tenus dans un moment où les calotins ont suscité quelques mouvements contre-révolutionnaires dans ladite commune”, the initial investigative report read, “nous avons crû devoir suivre ces propos indiscrets...”.<sup>159</sup> Defendants who were not from the immediate area were sometimes questioned as to whether they had been involved in specific *rassemblements* and incidents which had taken place, reinforcing the assumption that dissent was the work of outsiders.<sup>160</sup>

Thus, it would appear that judgements made in provincial courts were influenced as much by the traditional preoccupation with revolt, as with the new revolutionary conceptualization of verbal sedition. In instances where there were charges for both words and violent acts, it was often the latter which took precedence. For example, although Lachapelle’s seditious placards contained “des injures atroces contre le gouvernement”, it was his violent threats directed at the municipal officers who removed the posters which were highlighted by both *greffier* and witnesses.<sup>161</sup> In a similar case, involving a peasant in the Hautes-Pyrénées who refused to give up the last of his grain to the requisition order, it was not the charge of “offense à la loi” which concerned the courts as much as his “outrage à un officier municipal”.<sup>162</sup> However, even in these circumstances, the verbal component of opposition retains its importance. In the case of the weaver Thomas Bordas, whom we have cited on several occasions, the indictment contained two parts: Bordas was tried not only for his *propos contre-révolutionnaires* concerning the inadequacies of the current form of government, but also for “violence contre les gendarmes” who had attempted to restrain him. In the eventual outcome of the case, Bordas was acquitted of the second charge, his actions having been judged unintentional, but it was his words,

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<sup>158</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 29L18, procès contre Lachapelle, fructidor V - brumaire VI.

<sup>159</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-5, procès contre Roessard, brumaire II.

<sup>160</sup> See, for example, the case against La Jeunesse: A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Tribunal criminel, procès contre La Jeunesse, couvreur, errant et cherchant à gagner sa vie en travaillant, pour provocation à la royauté et émigration, frimaire VIII. The defendant was a young man, only 16, moving from place to place to find work, when he was accused by “la voix publique” as a “chef des brigands”, as well as for having shouted ‘vive le roi’. In his interrogation, he was asked, “s’il s’est jamais trouvé dans aucun rassemblement séditieux et s’il a eu connaissance des troubles qui ont eu lieu dans les cantons de Soumensac, de Duras et particulièrement dans la commune de Loubés?”.

<sup>161</sup> A.D. Dordogne 29L18, procès contre Lachapelle, fructidor V - brumaire VI.

<sup>162</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L justice non-côtée (thermidor-fructidor II), procès contre d’Argelès, messidor II.



judged to have been said intentionally and maliciously, which carried the greater threat.<sup>163</sup> Finally, verbal crimes continued to command more severe punishments than simple violence or disobedience, a fact which was recognised by locals wishing to take advantage of the political climate to guarantee that a case of interpersonal dispute would go in their favour. By arranging for an additional accusation of seditious words to be slipped in, the attention of the authorities was assured.<sup>164</sup>

### Public statements and private opinions

While the authorities remained predisposed to view civil disobedience and rebellion as more serious than verbal sedition, there was a tendency nonetheless to attribute ever-greater importance to the process by which the decision to take a stance for the opposition was formed. The ultimate responsibility in revolts lay with the individual whose words had stirred up trouble: in the decree of martial law, as well as all other revolutionary legislation against insurrection and rebellion, it is “les moteurs et instigateurs” of the incident who are subject to the harshest penalties, with those who had simply been “led astray” receiving little more than a reprimand and some instruction in their civic duties. Moreover, the focus upon propaganda and the *maintien de l'esprit public* in revolutionary discourse led to a growing awareness that the nature of public opinion was the responsibility of the government. The very existence of cases of seditious speech in rural areas reveals an increasing concern with the spread of ideas, the formation of opinions, and the result that both of these might have on the political disposition of the majority.

In their continuing efforts to control these processes, government and local authorities alike were preoccupied with the degree of publicity with which seditious statements were made.<sup>165</sup> The larger the audience and the more central the place of discussion, it was reasoned, the more serious the consequences, whether those consequences entailed merely changing ideas and opinions, or possibly inciting a revolt. Moreover, opinions voiced in public seemed to carry a greater import, for the character of a public declaration differed considerably from what might be said privately among

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<sup>163</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L45-260, procès contre Bordas, pluviôse IV.

<sup>164</sup> See, for example, the case against Bouisson, *père et fils*: A.D. Ariège, 8L61-11, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Louis et Thomas Bouisson, cultivateurs et maçons, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires, ventôse VI - frimaire VII. The question of vengeance and spite as motivations for accusations of seditious speech will be dealt with at more length in chapter V.

<sup>165</sup> Lisa Jane Graham also stresses this point: see “Crimes of Opinion”, pp. 85-7.



friends. Over and over again, the indictments against seditious speech as well as the depositions of witnesses underline the fact that statements were made *en présence de plusieurs personnes, dans des endroits publics*, or simply *publiquement*. Jeannet Begarrie, the day-labourer from the Hautes-Pyrénées whom we first met in chapter III, was accused in 1799 of having shouted assorted counter-revolutionary comments, “dans l’enceinte de la commune d’Argelès et dans la maison ditte Duhort et de manière à être entendu des voisins et des passants.”<sup>166</sup> Further north, in the market town of Nérac, a mason named Jean Dupouy was accused of “les propos les plus incendiaires et attentatoires à la sûreté publique en provoquant à voix haute le retour à la royauté par les cris souvent répétés de vive le Roi”. The municipal officers took special care when drafting their report, to indicate that

... ces propos audacieux et contre-révolutionnaires ont été tenus en présence de plusieurs citoyens dans la grande rue de cette commune près la maison du citoyen Gratian Gaillaret ainsi que dans d’autres lieux... il sera très possible par une enquête judiciaire... de reconnaître la vérité des faits qu’annonce la clameur publique en assignant divers témoins qui ont été à portée d’entendre les propos provocateurs dudit Dupouy.<sup>167</sup>

Parish priests, as a group, were regularly denounced for the import of their public statements. When the vicar of Beauregard, Luguet, was denounced for his unconstitutional words, the district administration wrote a covering report which stressed that “ces propos ont été prononcés en plein auditoire, et publiquement.”<sup>168</sup> Pierre Lachèze, similarly, *curé* of Beleymas, in the Dordogne, “débitait ouvertement” that he had only sworn his oath with restriction, having always been proud to “publier ses opinions inciviques”.<sup>169</sup> In cases of written sedition, placards posted up near the *place publique* or the *halle*, or “répandus avec profusion” were considered much more dangerous than those appearing only once or twice.<sup>170</sup>

In general, revolutionary courts and juries made decisions based on the principle that the greater the publicity, the more serious the crime. In the case against Macerouze Birol and several other young men accused of counter-revolutionary shouts in the commune of Lalinde, in the Dordogne, thirty-one witnesses were brought to the stand, on

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<sup>166</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée (1791-an III), procès contre Begarrie, fructidor VII.

<sup>167</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Jean Dupouy, traceur de pierres, pour provocation à la royauté, prairial VII-prairial VIII.

<sup>168</sup> A.D. Dordogne 17L14, procès contre Luguet.

<sup>169</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L44, procès contre Lachèze et d’autres, nivôse II.

<sup>170</sup> See especially A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L271-105 dossier 2, procès contre les quidams qui ont affiché des placards séditions, V-VI.



the assumption – which proved correct – that many people might have heard their boisterous political comments.<sup>171</sup> The fact that the statements of the weaver Bordas were made during a large assembly of citizens was stressed by the prosecution; his indictment read that he had “manifesté publiquement (et au moment où tous les fonctionnaires et autres citoyens du canton...prêtaient le serment de haine à la royauté) son désir d’être gouverné par un roi...”.<sup>172</sup> *Oui-dire*, or hearsay, was commonly used as evidence not only in an attempt to trace statements back to their source, but also because the more the information in question had travelled around the village, the greater its possible effect on the opinions of the villagers, and thus, the greater the crime.<sup>173</sup> Those with the urge to speak in front of crowds were particularly alarming to the authorities. One witness to the seditious words of Jean Bernard *dit* Biotte, of Verteilhac in the Dordogne, reported that Biotte had been “entouré d’une foule de citoyens [lorsqu’il] disait à haute voix que ceux qui avaient des assignats seraient perdus,”<sup>174</sup> and Raymond Frenange, the *juge de paix* of the canton of Tonneins in the Lot-et-Garonne, remarked that he simply “followed the crowd” in order to investigate the seditious words of Antoine St. Martin, *dit* Bronquet, a 31-year-old *laboureur*.<sup>175</sup>

Similarly, those whose conversations had been private in nature were generally acquitted, regardless of the statements involved. In many such cases, the charges were dropped because the court was unwilling to convict someone based upon the testimony of the few individuals – often only one or two – who had heard the words. Louis Sclafer, as we have seen previously, was a young medical officer accused of having made a string of counter-revolutionary statements at a country wedding. The man who denounced him, Pierre Teyssieux, had initially declared that Sclafer’s statements had been made “publiquement”, but later adjusted his deposition, allowing that while there had been many other people in the room, they had been otherwise occupied, and he could not be sure that they had heard the remarks.<sup>176</sup> In other cases, however, the defendants used the fact that they had not spoken in public to their advantage, even going to far as to cite their right to express opinions privately. In one situation, which occurred in the village of Verniolle, in the Ariège, the court was forced to admit that the key exchange between accused and

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<sup>171</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 25L36, procès contre Birol et d’autres, prairial IV.

<sup>172</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L45-260, procès contre Bordas, pluviôse IV.

<sup>173</sup> The use of hearsay evidence in trials will be discussed further in chapter V.

<sup>174</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L42, procès contre Bernard, *dit* Biotte, pluviôse II; témoin no. 10, Bernard Couquo.

<sup>175</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L51-5, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Antoine St. Martin, *dit* Bronquet, laboureur, pour propos royalistes, messidor-fructidor IV.

<sup>176</sup> A.D. Dordogne 24L39, procès contre Sclafer, frimaire-nivôse II.



witness “n’avait aucun caractère public, [et] que ces menaces dirigées contre un simple citoyen ne donnent lieu qu’à une action civile devant le juge de paix aux termes de la loi du 24 août 1790.”<sup>177</sup> Around the same time but slightly to the west, in the mountain valley of Campanan, in the Hautes-Pyrénées, Jean-Baptiste Tronc-Bernis was accused of having spread false news concerning the price of wheat in Tarbes. In his interrogation, Tronc-Bernis had claimed that he had only been repeating what he’d heard, and that when he had passed it on, it had been “non pas publiquement, mais confidentiellement à deux personnes,” and even then, only because they had asked what news he had heard in Tarbes. Tronc-Bernis was acquitted: as the public prosecutor summarised, while “des fausses nouvelles débitées dans les places publiques...meritent une punition contre celui qui s’en est rendu coupable, [...] si la nouvelle débitée n’a été donnée que sur l’invitation des ses concitoyens, cela changerait beaucoup la nature du délit.”<sup>178</sup>

On the one hand, it is true that private conversations were not as likely to cause revolts as statements made in public. On the other hand, there is evidence in the documents of a growing concern with how ideas spread and how opinions were formed. Thus, alongside the authorities’ concerns that seditious words might cause an insurrection, it is not uncommon to read that they might also discourage rural citizens and damage public opinion. In one case of a disrupted recruitment assembly in the Ariège, the municipality of Taurignan-Vieux worried that “de pareils outrages faits à la loi pourraient devenir funestes à la chose publique et corrompre l’esprit des citoyens.”<sup>179</sup> Nicolas Antoine Leclerc, *dit* Peymaud, an ex-soldier living near Bergerac who was introduced earlier in the chapter, was accused of the same crime which, the court maintained, would serve to “ralentir le zèle des citoyens et à pervertir, par ce moyen, l’esprit public.”<sup>180</sup> Finally, Pierre Gauthier, *dit* Viroulet, the travelling merchant we met earlier, was accused of making seditious statements on numerous occasions, in the *auberges* where he stopped while on business. Such words, the public prosecutor argued, were clearly part of a well-laid plan of “corruption de l’esprit public pour armer les citoyens les uns contre les autres”; Gauthier was saved only by the decision of an obstinate jury.<sup>181</sup> Reinforced by a growing awareness within the government that rural “esprit public” might be worth shaping, local

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<sup>177</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L35-6, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Louis Dhers et d’autres, cultivateurs, pour propos contre la sûreté publique, septembre-octobre 1793.

<sup>178</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L justice non-côtée, procès contre Abadie et Tronc-Bernis, juillet-août 1793.

<sup>179</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-7, procès contre Anel et Dedieu, août 1793 - frimaire II.

<sup>180</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L42, procès contre Leclerc, *dit* Peymaud, avril 1793 - mai 1794.

<sup>181</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, procès contre Gauthier, *dit* Viroulet, germinal II.



authorities were placing increasing value on the power of speech.

### *La question intentionnelle*

While both the publicity of a statement and its likelihood of inspiring seditious actions were taken into consideration by judges and juries, in the end, the verdicts in seditious speech trials most often came down to the question of intention. As we have seen, it was not counter-revolutionary sentiment in itself which was the target of the legislation, but the potential consequences of such sentiment being expressed publicly. As with much criminal law, it was the intention to bring about these consequences which was punished as much as the successful accomplishment of the objective: attempted murder, for example, is still a crime, even if the attempt is unsuccessful. Likewise, in the *Code pénal* of 1791, it is those “manoeuvres *tendant* à ébranler la fidélité des citoyens” which are illegal, and the revolutionary legislation of March and April 1793 targeted “*tentatives contre-révolutionnaires*”. Indeed, if the goal of the revolutionary government was to prevent counter-revolutionaries from winning over honest citizens, then acquittals for unsuccessful attempts – regardless of the intention – would have left those individuals free to continue in their mission.

As such, the issue of intention constituted a key component of trials against seditious speech. The *jury de jugement*, when it was active, was asked to determine first of all, whether a crime had been committed; second, whether the accused person was guilty of that crime; and third, whether he had committed it intentionally.<sup>182</sup> In fact, the majority of rural defendants who were acquitted by juries – the 90% cited earlier – were actually convicted of having made the statements of which they were accused, but it was the intervention of the jury, declaring, for example, “qu’il n’a pas agi en cela dans l’intention du crime” or that the words had not been spoken “méchamment ou avec dessein criminel”, which brought their release. In a case discussed above, Antoine St. Martin *aîné*, a *laboureur*, was arrested for theft, and it was only as they were taking him to prison that he expressed his frustration with the statement, “merde à la République”, thus gaining a second indictment. Following the laws to the letter, St. Martin was accused of “propos *tendant* à avilir le gouvernement républicain”; the jury, however, would not stand for such

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<sup>182</sup> A fourth question, pertaining to “circonstances atténuantes”, was introduced in the Directory era, and allowed juries to acquit defendants in cases where, for example, there persisted a strong suspicion that the accused person had been led by another to make the statements. It appears to have been used primarily, however, in cases where inebriation was a key factor. On the “fameuse question intentionnelle”, see Woloch, *The New Regime*, p.361.



a perversion of justice, and quickly acquitted him of such an overblown crime, citing lack of intention.<sup>183</sup> In another example, the case of Jeanne Floissac, an innkeeper's wife whose derisive comments to her clients about the new taxation system were denounced by another innkeeper, was carefully considered by the criminal court of the Lot-et-Garonne. She was acquitted, in the end, because

...tous les témoins...ont déclaré que la dite Floissac, lorsqu'elle tint ce propos, était dans une situation calme et tranquille, et qu'ils n'aperçurent ni dans son langage ni dans ses mouvements ni dans le ton dont elle se servit, aucune intention, ni d'inspirer la haine à la République française, ni de proposer, ni de provoquer le rétablissement de la royauté, ni d'en essayer auprès d'eux la moindre tentative, ni de les détourner du paiement des contributions, ni de leur faire entendre qu'elle voulut cesser de les payer, et qu'ils se retirent de chez elle sans avoir été scandalisés de ce qu'elle leur avait dit, et sans l'avoir suspectée de mauvaise volonté.<sup>184</sup>

Thus, intention to convince, it was assumed, would reveal itself in the mannerisms of the speaker. In a final example, defendants were acquitted because the crime had not been premeditated. The soldiers we met earlier, who were arrested for counter-revolutionary statements as they passed through the town of Agen, were acquitted because "ces propos tenus dans un cabaret et dans l'ivresse sans aucun dessein prémédité ni projet contre-révolutionnaire n'offrent que des réponses vagues et équivoques amenées par des questions captieuses et inconsidérées et à la suite d'une conversation animée par le vin."<sup>185</sup> The opposite of *propos mal-intentionnés*, the phrase "propos vagues" was often used to dismiss cases where no real crime appeared to have been committed.

Clearly, it was on the question of intention that provincial juries exercised the most power to save rural malcontents from the harsh laws of the Revolution and its ultimate sentence, the guillotine. However, when defendants further up the social ladder attempted to use this argument, the jury was not always convinced, as the case of Jean-Augustin Mandavy, *ex-conseiller à la cour des Aides*, makes clear.<sup>186</sup> Mandavy, who had been accused of detailing a counter-revolutionary plot in a personal letter which had fallen into the wrong hands, insisted that his words had been nothing more than "une pensée communiquée dans l'intimité d'une correspondance de simple amitié, sans intention qu'elle fut divulguée, avec l'intention au contraire"; and went on to argue that "une telle pensée qui n'est complot ni projet, mais une simple opinion, ne peut pas être un crime, s'il est vrai

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<sup>183</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, procès contre St. Martin, *dit* Bronquet.

<sup>184</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17-8 and 2L97-22, procès contre Floissac, juillet-août 1793.

<sup>185</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17- 7 and 2L97-19, procès contre Meunier et Denave, août 1793.

<sup>186</sup> Procès contre Jean-Augustin Mandavy, *ex-conseiller à la cour des Aides*, pour écrits contre-révolutionnaires, brumaire II; cited in *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), vol. 1, pp. 243ff.



comme l'établissent nos premiers principes sociaux, que nul ne peut être poursuivi pour ses opinions particulières." The prosecuting authorities, however, countered with the argument that "on ne peut pas considérer comme une simple opinion vague un écrit adressé à une autre personne qu'on cherche à égarer... la manifestation d'une telle opinion faite à une ou plusieurs individus est subversive du gouvernement, quand même cette manifestation ne pourrait égarer qu'un seul citoyen." Mandavy was found guilty of conspiracy through counter-revolutionary writings, and was guillotined on the *place publique* of Périgueux, at five o'clock in the afternoon of 25 brumaire II.

While the case of Mandavy is far from typical in either the social origin of the defendant or the attitude of the jury, it nonetheless raises the pertinent distinction between the right to hold an opinion, and the crime which results from attempting to convince others of it. The judges and juries of provincial criminal courts had no difficulty in making this distinction, and frequently referred back to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Rights of August 1789. In one case, the mayor of a small village in the Dordogne had told the inhabitants that they could put their animals to pasture in the fields near the river, a suggestion which was apparently impolitic with regard to the rights of local landholders. The incident was resolved without being sent before the courts, but the police report pointed out that the mayor could not be regarded as a criminal for having expressed his opinion: "si le sieur Lassimonie avait cherché à échauffer le peuple, en lui présentant des idées qui luy fussent agréables, qu'il se fut entouré sur une place d'une quantité d'auditeurs, sans doute, il serait coupable...", they argued, but since he did not have these intentions, the matter was dropped.<sup>187</sup> It is interesting to note that, as in the case of Jeanne Floissac, above, the physical disposition of the speaker towards his audience was taken as evidence of his intention or lack thereof. The most common expression of this argument, however, is that given by the public prosecutor in the case against Joseph Guraboeuf, the *curé* of Beaussac, for *discours séditeux*. "Il y a bien liberté d'opinion et de conscience", the district court judge granted, "mais pas dans la mesure où elle trouble l'ordre public."<sup>188</sup>

In fact, the plea that the words had not been intended to bring about disorder or to change others' opinions is the method most commonly used by defendants in the attempt to clear themselves of an accusation of seditious speech. In a large number of cases, suspects insisted that they had only been repeating what they had heard, without any

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<sup>187</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 5L13, Registre des délibérations de l'administration du district de Montignac, 27 nov 1790, pp. 67v-70r.

<sup>188</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 19L75, procès contre Guraboeuf, mars-avril 1791.



intention to cause trouble. Such was the defence of Abadie and Vignec, the two men we met earlier who had reported the news of high grain prices in Tarbes, as well as that of Marguerite Cazes, whose off-handed remark about *assignats* only being good for covering the floor was taken up by authorities in the court where she was acting as a witness in another trial.<sup>189</sup> Cazes' explanation was similar to that of Abadie and Vignec: as the report had it, "elle a dit n'avoir pas l'intention de discréditer les assignats et n'avoir parler ainsi que parce qu'elle avait ouï-dire que les vieux assignats ne valaient plus rien." Other defendants insisted that there had been a misunderstanding, and volunteered corrected versions of the statements they were supposed to have made. Still others insisted that the "misunderstanding" had been intentional, and that they had been set up by vengeful individuals. Some, however, had the aplomb to defend themselves and their right to hold any opinion they wished. "Que voulez-vous, c'est mon opinion", was the repeated defence of Noël Frié, a saddler living in the market-town of Rieux, in the Haute-Garonne, who had been accused of speaking ill of his uncle, a rural parish priest who had sworn the oath required by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.<sup>190</sup> While rural citizens clearly did not wish to come under the jurisdiction of the revolutionary courts, neither were they willing to give up their right to think for themselves.

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<sup>189</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L justice non-côtée, procès contre Abadie et Tronc-Bernis, juillet-août 1793; A.D. Ariège, 13L24-1, procès contre Cazes, floréal IV.

<sup>190</sup> A.N. D XXIX 6 (59), procès contre Frié *fiils*, Court, *dit* Parisien, et d'autres, février 1791.



## V.

### CONFLICTING INFORMATION AND THE FORMATION OF RURAL POLITICAL OPINION

It would be inaccurate to assert that the history of the rural reaction to the French Revolution remains to be written. As described in the introduction, the effort to rescue the peasantry from historical oblivion first began in 1924 with the research of Georges Lefebvre, with Paul Bois, Charles Tilly, Donald Sutherland and their contemporaries continuing the work several decades later. Indeed, in recent years, and particularly around the celebration of the bicentennial, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the question of how the Revolution was experienced in the countryside.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, most of the work on the peasantry thus far has been based, necessarily, on documents written by individuals outside the peasantry: by government administrators and representatives of other literate urban institutions or, at best, by the local administrators of rural communities. The value of the research presented here is that, while these more traditional documents have been taken into consideration, the emphasis is placed upon sources which give a voice to rural citizens themselves. Using the judicial and police enquiries into incidents of seditious speech, we can actually listen to the reactions of peasants confronted with the political events and ideas of the Revolution, allowing us to see the Revolution more clearly from their perspective.

What exactly were those reactions? As we saw in chapter III, the police and judicial archives of the Revolution are overflowing with investigations of political

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<sup>1</sup> The body of research on the experience of the Revolution in the countryside is far too vast to include here. However, a good place to start is with contributions to the journal *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, as well as to the conferences *Les pratiques politiques en province à l'époque de la Révolution française* (1987), *La Révolution française et le monde rural* (1990), and *Reshaping France: Town, Country and Region during the French Revolution* (1991), as well as other works cited in the preceeding chapters.



statements made in rural communities. From religion to taxation, military recruitment to types of government, country dwellers were clearly in the habit of expressing political ideas and opinions on every topic which affected them. In some cases, the information communicated amounted to a news report, whether based on an official piece of information or borrowing from the world of rumour, gossip and hearsay. In others, rural citizens infused songs with political meaning and forged powerful anti-revolutionary slogans from familiar expressions, creating an atmosphere of dissent and scorn in the villages and market towns. Most commonly, expressions of discontent with the political situation took the form of complaints, regrets, or exclamations of disgust, usually voiced in a social setting such as an artisan's shop, a local watering hole or the *place publique*. Clearly, the transcribed statements of country inhabitants represent an invaluable source of information on how the Revolution was received in rural areas.

However, to what extent should we take such statements at face value, as clear expressions of peasant opinion? As we saw in the introduction, historians who study the disenfranchised must consider the fact that evidence from judicial sources might be tainted, either by the context of constraint itself, or by the intervention, conscious or unconscious, of those who composed the documents. In the case of the rural seditious speech trials used here, several factors must be taken into account, including the sincerity of the witnesses and the motivations of the denouncers, particularly during the Terror. While to ignore these documents, so vibrant and revelatory of peasant thought and experience, would be a travesty for the study of the Revolution in the countryside, we must exercise extreme caution in their interpretation. In this fifth and final chapter, we will begin by analysing the context of the political statements recorded in the archives, including those of the accused, of the witnesses, and of bystanders. Upon reaching a conclusion regarding the extent to which these statements indicate actual peasant opinion, we will move on to analyse rural reaction to different types and sources of information. Having thus determined how oral, unofficial statements influenced rural public opinion, both in isolation and in relationship to the flood of official information examined in chapter II, our goal will then be to reveal how much the authorities' attempt to control public opinion was necessary, and, in the event, successful.



## Using the Words Attributed to the Accused as a Source of Public Opinion

The most intelligible and most conveniently documented enunciations of rural political opinion in police and judicial sources are the indicted statements themselves: the words which were objectionable in the eyes of the authorities. By and large, it was the statements of the accused which were highlighted in the discussion of topics drawing peasant comment in chapter III, and which provoked the government reaction analysed in chapter IV. These statements effectively set the tone of political discussion in the village, providing new information for the digestion, reflection and comment of both addressees and bystanders. However, as accessible as the words of those individuals charged with seditious speech might be, in point of fact they require the most attention to the context in which they were uttered. True, it is often quite obvious that the statement in question was, in fact, made, and the defendants' naïve and optimistic attempts to convince the jury of their innocence make their guilt all the more clear. There are, however, a fair number of cases in which it is clear to the historian – and often, to the jury as well – that the denunciation of seditious words was the result of the ill intentions of a vengeful or malicious individual. Consider the two soldiers who, having stayed at the lodging house of a certain Jean Benet *jeune* in Tarascon, denounced their landlord for seditious speech after having been asked to move on.<sup>2</sup> Or the case of Jeanne Floissac, the female *aubergiste* charged by fellow innkeeper Antoine Barroussel with having made disparaging remarks about the new taxes. It was so obvious to the court that Barroussel's denunciation had been motivated by the prospect of getting rid of his competition that Floissac successfully brought a damages suit totalling 300 *livres* against her accuser.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, one of the keys to knowing whether or not indicted words can be taken as the true opinion of those who spoke them is considering the motivation of those who spoke against the accused.

### Reliance on oral testimony

From the perspective of the investigating authorities, the crime of anti-governmental speech was fundamentally different from crimes such as theft or murder, in that it left behind no evidence apart from the phrases contained in the memories of those who were present. With no other "démonstration matérielle", judicial and police personnel were forced to depend heavily upon the accounts of witnesses in order to bring a

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<sup>2</sup> A.D. Ariège, 13L25-8, procès contre Benet et d'autres, floréal-prairial IV.

<sup>3</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17-8 and 2L97-22, procès contre Floissac, juillet-août 1793.



prosecution. After receiving a report of an incident, the authority charged with the initial *instruction* – usually a municipal officer or a *juge de paix* – interviewed the individuals who had witnessed the objectionable statements, and took down a series of written depositions. Very few trial transcripts exist for the revolutionary period, owing to the enlightened preoccupation with both transparency and preventing the jury from being unduly influenced by anything other than the immediate drama of the confrontation between witnesses and accused.<sup>4</sup> However, it is evident from the records of the final decisions of both jury and judge that the testimonies themselves constituted a primary focus of the hearing.

Moreover, witness accounts represented not only information about the crime, but evidence of its severity. As discussed in chapter IV, the authorities considered seditious speech dangerous because of its effect on public opinion: thus, if there were no witnesses, or if the witnesses did not remember the statements as expressed by the denouncer, then there would essentially have been no crime and the entire matter would be dropped. Indeed, it was so important to learn the consequences of the statements that often *ouï-dire*, or hearsay, was accepted as primary evidence, and easily accepted primary evidence at that: while the possible motivations of witnesses were often at issue, the responsibility for a second-hand report fell to the individual who relayed it, with the veracity of the original story going unquestioned. Where faceless bands of youngsters had run through the streets at night shouting counter-revolutionary insults, for example, authorities followed any available leads to learn both the culprits' identity and their exact crime. In the Year VII the Tarascon police interviewed 79 witnesses in such an attempt, asking each whether they knew anything, "*même par ouï-dire*", of the carousing which had taken place the previous week; many supplied second-hand reports. The response of one witness, who confessed "*ne rien savoir directement ou indirectement*", gives a further illustration of how hearsay evidence was admitted.<sup>5</sup> It was equally common for authorities to interrogate suspects based on the statements which "*la voix publique*" maintained had been made, or on words which witnesses testified having heard about from other villagers. The case of Jean Fossat,

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<sup>4</sup> See the contribution of Howard Brown (Binghamton University, SUNY), to the discussion group H-France, on the topic "Eighteenth-Century Legal Procedure", 18-19 October 2002 (H-France archives are currently available at <http://lists.uakron.edu/archives/h-france.html>), as well as Woloch, *The New Regime*, pp. 357, 359-61.

<sup>5</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d'autres, messidor V-brumaire VI. Witness no. 41 (dossier 1), reported "*ne rien savoir directement ou indirectement*". For witnesses who reported *ouï-dire* evidence, see, in dossier 1, witnesses 5, 7, 31, 37, 38, and 40, and in dossier 2, witnesses 13, 14, 16, 18, 22, and 23. For a similar instance, see A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L271-105 dossier 2, procès contre les quidams qui ont affiché des placards séditieux, an V - an VI.



the vicar of Lescousse, in the Ariège, is exemplary here.<sup>6</sup> In interrogating Fossat, the local *juge de paix* made extensive use not only of witness accounts which attributed certain anti-constitutional statements to the vicar, but of those accounts which merely provided second-hand reports. François Ferriès, for example, a physician living in the nearby hamlet of St Martin d'Oydes, had not been at church on the days when Fossat had given the controversial sermons. While "personnellement il n'a pas entendu tenir des propos contre la constitution par M. Fossat", Ferriès nevertheless went on to detail the various reports he had heard from his patients regarding Fossat's inappropriate comments.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Fossat's indiscretion had been one of the most interesting local topics of discussion as of late, and an additional five witnesses highlighted hearsay evidence in their depositions.

While the verbal nature of speech crimes inflated the importance of witness accounts, such heavy dependence upon the testimony of bystanders was also a source of problems. In some cases, the trial process itself was interrupted by difficulties in arranging for witnesses to testify. This was particularly apparent in trials sent on to the infamous *tribunal révolutionnaire* in Paris. In the case of Pierre Lacombe, a 51-year-old *cultivateur* charged with *propos contre-révolutionnaires*, only one of the four original witnesses was present at the hearing, a serious problem considering the importance of oral exchange in revolutionary trials, and likely one of the reasons Lacombe was acquitted.<sup>8</sup> For the trial of Pierre Barrot and Guillaume Chaveroche, two sharecroppers from the Dordogne accused of making statements intended to discourage new recruits, the forwarding court in Périgueux submitted a bill for thirty-four *livres* to pay for the cost of seven of the original fourteen witnesses to testify in Paris: the cost was so high, the bill read, because of "la difficulté qu'on a éprouvé à trouver le domicile des témoins, et surtout à raison du mauvais état des chemins qui dans ces cantons sont presque impraticables". Like Lacombe, Barrot and Chaveroche were acquitted.<sup>9</sup> The problems associated with bringing deponents to the courtroom are also apparent in locally conducted trials, particularly where the witnesses themselves were transient. The trial of Jean Barus, accused of asking various

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<sup>6</sup> A.D. Ariège, 10L31-10, and A.N. D XXIX 2 (16), procès contre Fossat, août 1791.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, testimony of François Ferriès, maître en chirurgie, habitant de St. Martin d'Oydes, 6 août 1791.

<sup>8</sup> A.N. W 438-25, and *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), vol. 1, pp. 317-8, procès contre Lacombe, octobre 1793-fructidor II. As Isser Woloch points out, the new regime's insistence upon oral testimony meant that in cases where important witnesses were unable to attend the trial, their previous depositions were inadmissible. Woloch, *The New Regime*, p. 359-61.

<sup>9</sup> A.N. W347-686, Tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris, and *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), vol. 1, pp.325-8; procès contre Pierre Barrot et Guillaume Chaveroche, métayers, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires tendants à empêcher le recrutement, août 1793-nivôse II. The cost report from the criminal court at Périgueux is dated 15 germinal II and is contained in the A.N. file W347.



individuals at the market in Tarbes to exchange *assignats* for hard currency at a loss to himself, was rushed through, “vu le danger qu’il y aurait de perdre une partie des preuves et des témoignages qui peuvent amener à la démonstration matérielle de ce crime, parce que plusieurs des témoins sont des marchands forains ou étrangers.”<sup>10</sup> Catherine Lavigne, who had reportedly incited soldiers to desert by offering to hide them in the vineyards, was held in custody for more than two months while the authorities attempted to relocate the three witnesses, all *volontaires* who had since moved on. Lavigne was eventually released, but not before she had sent numerous pleas to the authorities begging that she be allowed to return to care for her children.<sup>11</sup>

### Reliability of witness accounts

What concerns us here, however, is not especially the authorities’ inability to successfully prosecute such cases, but rather, the degree to which we can rely upon witness accounts as an accurate description of the speech incident. From this perspective, too, the over-dependence of prosecutors on oral testimony is problematic, as insincerity or personal motivations of the individuals making the reports could easily be a factor in the character of the attributed statements. In some instances, for example, defendants were brought to trial on no more than the word of their accusers. In the case of the Jean Benet, described above, the only so-called witnesses to the statements of the *logeur* were the disgruntled soldiers who accused him.<sup>12</sup> In another instance, two artisans of the local political club accused *cultivateur* Jean-Baptiste Tarri, of the Lot-et-Garonne, of expressing royalist sentiment. Something of a flirt, Tarri had reportedly been gazing at the night sky, a *citoyenne* on each arm, when he remarked that the pattern of the stars seemed to form two *fleurs-de-lys* and a royal baton. Tarri’s denouncers suggested that these words had implied “que le ci-devant Louis XVI avait été injustement mis à mort, puisque le ciel avait gravé dans une étoile les marques de son blason,” but Tarri himself insisted that the accusation was pure fabrication.<sup>13</sup> In these two cases, it is quite likely that the reason no other witnesses to the statements could be found was that the words were the invention of malicious denouncers. However, in cases where the seditious statements were uttered as

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<sup>10</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée, procès contre Barus, ventôse II.

<sup>11</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-15, procès contre Lavigne, octobre 1793-frimaire II.

<sup>12</sup> A.D. Ariège, 13L25-8, procès contre Benet et d’autres, floréal-prairial IV.

<sup>13</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-1, 2L98-93, procès contre Tarri, nivôse II. The document reads “les marques de son *couvreux*”; however, I have not been unable to find a definition for the last word, and believe the sense is that of “blason”.



part of an act of resistance to authority, the words were often witnessed only by the municipal officers present, a circumstance which, again, was problematic from the standpoint of the prosecution. The case against *laboureur* Jean d'Argelès, *dit* Tucoulet, is illustrative here. D'Argelès was visited by three commissioners intent on enforcing the grain requisition laws in the department of the Hautes-Pyrénées. The farmer's words – that he had no grain at all, not even to feed his own family, and that he had not the slightest respect for the municipal officers or their decrees – were heard only by the three *commissaires*, and the charges were dropped.<sup>14</sup>

The fact that the case against d'Argelès was brought before a criminal court at all is partially due to timing. The remarks were made in the summer of 1794 – the height of the Terror – when the ideological goal of rooting out dissent led both prosecutors and judges to overlook some of the finer points of justice, such as the need to positively establish that a crime had taken place. The overweening zeal of Jacobin clubs, for example, led to the denunciation of numerous private conversations, as well as remarks which had been made months or even years earlier. Pressure was put on club members, particularly in the more rabid *comités de surveillance*, to stand up in meetings and name individuals who had “spoken sedition either recently or in the past”, and those who had no one to denounce concocted a story in order to keep from becoming the focus of criticism themselves. Aubin Bayssière, a manual labourer, felt this pressure when he joined the political society in the nearby town of Castelsagret, in the Lot-et-Garonne.<sup>15</sup> When he was asked by the admissions secretary “s’il n’avait jamais entendu des propos contraires à la Révolution”, Bayssière declared that his former employer, *propriétaire* Jean Frontin, had said in 1791 that even with the abolition of land rents the people were not better off, and that the National Assembly, which was composed of nothing but “foutue canaille,” should be overthrown. The fact that Frontin was the father of two suspected *émigrés* merely whet the society members’ appetites further. Although the case was heard in the criminal court at the departmental *chef-lieu* of Agen, it was quickly thrown out: not only was the accuser the only witness, the court declared, but the denounced crime dated back more than three years, before the Penal Code had even come into effect.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée (thermidor-fructidor II), procès contre d'Argelès, messidor II.

<sup>15</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L98-48, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Jean Frontin, père d'émigrés, cultivateur, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires, floréal II.

<sup>16</sup> On this topic see also A.D. Lot-et-Garonne 2L98 and 2L105, procès contre Jean et Guillaume Marabal, pluviôse II.



Another case from the era of the *gouvernement révolutionnaire* forced judicial authorities in the Dordogne to reflect even further upon the question of witness reliability. The case is that of Louis Sclafer, the young rural physician we met in chapter IV, who was brought to trial for seditious statements which he had reportedly made at a wedding in Veyssières, a hamlet of the parish of Ste. Nathaleine.<sup>17</sup> Sclafer's two denouncers, 32-year-old Pierre Teyssieux, a farmer, and 24-year-old Jacques Beaudet, another *officier de santé*, described having heard Sclafer make numerous alarming remarks, including that the Convention was made up of villains and that constitutional priests were not fit to live, and added that Sclafer had sung many songs at the wedding "qui furent jugées aristocratiques". However, a number of factors cast doubt on the prosecution's case. The main witness, Teyssieux, was in fact a member of a particularly virulent local *comité de surveillance*, and it emerged that Beaudet had only seconded the denunciations at Teyssieux's insistence. Moreover, Teyssieux had constructed his accusation around the fact that Sclafer's words were particularly dangerous because they had been voiced in such a public setting. However, further investigation revealed that the other wedding guests had not found the songs to be "aristocratiques"; indeed, they testified that he had only sung "pour égayer la société".<sup>18</sup> As for the seditious statements, the denouncers were eventually forced to admit that Sclafer had made the comments with each of them individually, in private conversations. In a lengthy exposition, part of which has already been cited,<sup>19</sup> the public prosecutor summarised the flimsiness of the case:

La seule preuve qu'il y eu contre l'accusé consistait uniquement dans les déclarations des deux dénonciateurs, qui déposent chacun des propos différents [...] il y a même, cette circonstance remarquable dans leurs déclarations, c'est qu'ils ont avancé que les propos qu'ils imputent à l'accusé avaient été par lui tenus dans une noce, où il y avait une foule de personnes, et qu'ils se trouvent, cependant, les seuls qui les aient entendus, et ils ont été même forcés l'un et l'autre, de convenir que chacun d'eux était seul à causer avec lui quand, suivant eux, il leur a tenu ces propos... Il est cependant bien extraordinaire que, dans une assemblée si nombreuse, il n'y ait eu que deux personnes qui aient entendu les propos imputés à l'accusé, et que chacun d'eux n'ait point entendu ce qu'il a dit à l'autre... Cette contradiction évidente jette de terribles soupçons sur la loyauté de ce dénonciateur. Nous sommes presque forcés de convenir que ces dénonciations pourraient bien n'être que le résultat de la haine et de la vengeance, surtout si nous devons ajouter foi au bruit public qui court à cet égard...

Before writing to the *tribunal révolutionnaire* in Paris to ask for guidance, the public prosecutor mused that while the job of a magistrate was to prevent the enemies of the

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<sup>17</sup> A.D. Dordogne 24L39, procès contre Sclafer, frimaire-nivôse II.

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the copies of the song lyrics included with the documentation of the trial reveal them to have been rather pompous, dull phrases based on classical theatre, and indeed, not seditious at all. See *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> See chapter IV, page 222, note 147.



Republic from corrupting *l'esprit public*, it was not unthinkable that those same enemies could be making use of the system to denounce patriotic citizens and, by thus dividing their enemy, "venir plus facilement à leur dessein criminel".

In the end, the handful of cases without corroborating witness accounts are of minor interest, for even if the incident did take place as denounced, little "communication" of political ideas would have been involved. However, the problem of sincerity in oral testimony, of both denouncer and witness, is not unique to the Terror: it is a universal concern which affects most of the documents studied here to some extent. In the generally charged atmosphere of the Revolution, sedition trials saw more than their share of denunciations for the sake of vengeance or personal animosity, and it is the historian's task to read between the lines, as it were, in order to ascertain how much of the material presented in court can be taken to be accurate. Individuals bent on righting personal wrongs, or those who simply had a malicious disposition, saw an opportunity to advance their own interests, and accusations of seditious speech accordingly appeared in personal disputes which otherwise would not have left the civil or correctional courts. For example, the case against Louis and Thomas Bouisson, a father and son accused of a number of counts of violence, personal insults and disorder, was given the full attention of the authorities when the denouncers added that the father, Louis, had made it known "qu'il désirait l'ancien régime, qu'il voulait un roi et qu'il l'aurait."<sup>20</sup> In other cases, the motivation of the denouncers is even more explicit. In the trial against Cassaigne père, the physician accused of counter-revolutionary discourse whom we first met in chapter II, the denouncer was a female innkeeper who, as the copious documentation included with the trial makes clear, had been a thorn in Cassaigne's side for many years as a recalcitrant tenant.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Jean Bernard, *dit* Biotte, a *cultivateur* from a rural commune in the Dordogne, was almost certainly guilty of removing and defacing decrees which concerned the *assignats* from the church door. Nevertheless, it is significant that of the whole village, the woman who brought his activities to the attention of the authorities was Cécile Desages, the widow of a button maker who had been denounced some months earlier by Biotte as an *émigré* and executed on 14 germinal II – a relationship which hardly makes her impartial. Biotte, unsurprisingly, was acquitted for lack of evidence.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, there is certainly evidence that the authorities' efforts to contain counter-

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<sup>20</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L61-11, procès contre Louis et Thomas Bouisson, ventôse VI - frimaire VII.

<sup>21</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée, procès contre Cassaigne père, pluviôse II.

<sup>22</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L42, procès contre Bernard, *dit* Biotte, pluviôse II.



revolutionary discourse in the countryside were often harnessed to serve other desires. Denunciations for seditious speech, regardless of the truth of the charge, could arise from long-standing social tensions, the desire for revenge from a previous run-in, or even – in at least one instance – from an unpaid gambling debt.<sup>23</sup> However, it is not only of denouncers' statements that we, as historians, need be wary: the reliability of witness accounts must also be verified before the indicted statements of villagers may be taken for political opinion. Just as with those who brought the incident to the attention of the authorities, there is ample evidence that those called upon to verify the statements might have done so with equally malicious intentions. Seditious speech trials often revealed the divisions which existed within villages, as half of the witnesses corroborated the accusation, and the other half attempted to mitigate the accusation by denying any knowledge of the event, attesting to the civic stature of the defendant, or suggesting excuses for his or her behaviour. The trial against the Marabal brothers of Monbalen (Lot-et-Garonne), for example, essentially bespoke a generational conflict between the older, more conservative municipal council – where Guillaume Marabal had been the mayor – and the younger, more zealous republicans who had replaced them in office.<sup>24</sup> In the case against Joseph Mathe and his companions, young people accused of “troubles séditeux” in the village of Gestières (Ariège), the fifty-three pages of testimony were nearly equally divided between support and condemnation of the accused. As explained by the local butcher, Jean-Baptiste Rivière, it was a question of discord “entre les deux partis, d’aristocratie et démocratie, qui ont toujours régné au dit lieu de Gestières...”<sup>25</sup>

A similar occurrence marks the history of the market town of Sorges (Dordogne), where witnesses were called upon to support the claims of the municipality and of the political society against the parish priest, Pierre-Élie Lasescuras.<sup>26</sup> While most of the witnesses denied having heard Lasescuras speak out against the constitution or attempt to divide the parish – the charges brought by the municipal officers – certain individuals did bring up personal grievances when asked if they had “anything else to reproach their *curé*”, serving to augment the case for the prosecution. A reasonable number, for example, bore resentment from instances when the *curé* had refused a baptism or a burial, although Lasescuras countered that the families in question had not attended church for months

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<sup>23</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée (prairial II), procès contre Jacques Latoupie, domestique, pour paroles inciviques, septembre 1793.

<sup>24</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne 2L98 and 2L105, procès contre Jean et Guillaume Marabal, pluviôse II.

<sup>25</sup> A.D. Ariège 8L33-9, procès contre Mathe et d’autres, witness no. 2, déposition 19 avril 1793.

<sup>26</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L63, procès contre Lasescuras, brumaire II.



before the incident. One witness, Guillaume Gourvat, said bitterly that “le curé le menaça et le traita d’insolent”.<sup>27</sup> However, for the most part, witnesses responded in the negative when the justice of the peace asked if they knew why the *conseil général* had denounced the *curé*, with many adding “qu’ils furent grandement surpris d’apprendre cette dénonciation, ne le croyant pas coupable”. In his final statement, Lasescuras declared, “je ne dois la persécution que j’éprouve qu’à une coalition de gens riches de la commune”, a “coalition” which was ultimately victorious: “reconnaissant l’inutilité de [s]on ministère”, the *curé* soon abandoned his position.

In each of these three examples, the reliability of the witnesses in corroborating the indicted statements must be seriously considered before the words of the accused can be accepted as veritable. Indeed, those who testified often did so with their own purposes in mind, for in any case, the local dynamics of power and personality tended to matter more to peasants than did principles imposed by outsiders who had arrived to interfere with village concerns in the first place. In some circumstances, witnesses would have been concerned for their own interest. The pressure to be seen to conform to a Republican ideology was a universal phenomenon, and not one limited to the members of political clubs. Witnesses might well have feared that if they did not repudiate the statements of their fellow villagers, they would fall under suspicion themselves for harbouring counter-revolutionary tendencies. Certainly, there are numerous instances where witnesses attempted to protect local people, or where they claimed ignorance to avoid perjuring themselves; such instances betray a certain truth to the words spoken, and will be further discussed below. However, it is worth noting that there was a certain financial incentive to testifying, for witnesses who participated in a correctional or criminal trial were remunerated for their day’s work.<sup>28</sup> The actual amounts reimbursed – which varied considerably depending on the region and the era – were unlikely to truly compensate artisans and members of the rural elite. However, for the poorer sort, bearing witness at court would have represented not only an opportunity to stand up and be recognised by the

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Second interrogation of witnesses, 6 frimaire II.

<sup>28</sup> “Code des délits et des peines”, 3 brumaire IV. The *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (5<sup>th</sup> edition, 1798), also describes the arrangement: “On appelle Taxe de dépens, Le Règlement fait par autorité de Justice, de certains frais qui ont été faits à la poursuite d’un procès.” The amount which a given witness was “taxé” by the court is often indicated next to his deposition in the judicial archives; at one of the earlier trials in the sample, that against Linard (A.D. Dordogne, B843-2, 1790), witnesses were “taxed” 5 *livres* for a two-day appearance; in 1797, at the trial of Vidalot, in the Ariège, witnesses were indemnified 40 *sous* each (A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d’autres, messidor V-brumaire VI). In the trial against Barrot and Chaveroche, witness no. 12 complained about that he had testified before the *juge de paix* with at least forty other witnesses, and that none of them had been paid; A.N. W347-686 and *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), vol. 1, pp.325-8, août 1793-nivôse II.



notables of the community, but also a source of much-needed currency so difficult to come by when the tax collector passed through.

### Defendants who stood by their opinions

Thus, we must be wary of taking indicted statements at face value too quickly, for both the denouncers and the witnesses were sometimes motivated by interests other than those of justice. However, there are a number of circumstances in which we can be more certain that the seditious words in question were, in fact, spoken by the individual to whom they were attributed. One of the simplest of these concerns those instances where it emerged that witnesses have been threatened in order to prevent their testimony. In the 1794 trial against the footman Valon for statements discrediting the *assignats*, for example, a mason named Jean Saulcon who had witnessed the statements asked to testify a second time: at his first deposition, he explained, “il n’eût pas la liberté de déposer de tous les faits qui étaient à sa connaissance contre ledit Valon” because, incredibly, “ledit Valon...était présent à l’information.”<sup>29</sup> The situation was similar in the case against Vidalot and his companions, the young people who terrorised the residents of Tarascon one night in the Year VII with their seditious shouts.<sup>30</sup> In this case, Etienne Castres, a 38-year-old rope maker, also testified a second time, saying that before his first deposition, Vidalot had threatened him with a “coup de fusil” if he identified any of the rioters. Castres’ story was confirmed by another witness, his sister-in-law, who had been present at the exchange.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Castres was not the only one threatened: Joseph Soulié, a 29-year-old farmer, testified that the word on the street was, “que si l’on déposait contre ceux formant l’attroupement dont [il] s’agit, foutre, il y aurait des coups de [trigues]... on se garderai de déposer contre ces gens-là.”<sup>32</sup> In other cases, it is the fact that the defendant is a powerful citizen in the community which leads them to manipulate the outcome of a trial. M. Rey, the parish priest of the village of Villac, in the Dordogne, reportedly invoked his parishioners from the pulpit, making use of his position of authority and his role as the moral leader of the community, to take back their signatures from the depositions which

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* (Barrot and Chaveroche), witness no. 10.

<sup>30</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d’autres, messidor V-brumaire VI.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, accounts of Étienne Castres, 38 ans, cordier, habitant de Tarascon, and of Marie Saverdun, épouse de François Castres, ménagère, habitante de Tarascon, 32 ans; witness accounts no. 2-20 and 2-23 respectively, depositions 8-9 vendémiaire VII.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, account of Joseph Soulié, 29 ans, cultivateur, habitant de Tarascon, witness account no. 2-28, déposition 8-9 vendémiaire VII.



they had signed against him.<sup>33</sup> In each of these cases, the fact that defendants sought to keep witnesses from revealing what they knew merely acts as evidence of their guilt, and thus, of the accuracy of the statements attributed to them.

However, such revelations are quite rare within the archive. Indeed, it stands to reason that many attempts to silence witnesses were successful, and that few individuals would have had the courage to reveal the situation to the authorities. Nevertheless, such an event represents only one circumstance in which historians can be relatively certain that the words over which a trial took place were in fact spoken. A remarkable number of defendants actually admitted having made the statements of which they were accused, standing up for the right to express their opinions and refusing to abandon their ideological position for the sake of an easy acquittal. The most common group to fall into this category were the parish priests. For village *curés*, opinion on religious matters was a matter of faith and salvation, and thus not to be repudiated lightly; moreover, the majority of such trials took place in the early years of the Revolution, before the intractable ideology of the Terror had infiltrated the judicial system, armed with the guillotine to carry out its bloody resolutions. As we saw in chapter III, village *curés* often made intelligent, articulate speeches, which were made all the more effective by the speaker's training and experience in preaching to a rural audience. Among the statements considered seditious by the authorities, we find various objections to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy – in particular the proposal that church officials be elected, leading to comments that the National Assembly was meddling in affairs where it had no jurisdiction, and that the ministrations of constitutionally elected priests would be null and void – as well as gloomy predictions that religion itself would be lost.<sup>34</sup> In the case of a public announcement *not* to swear the oath required by the Civil Constitution – an act which was often considered seditious in itself – the issue was even more clearly a question of conscience. As Jean Jougla, the *curé* of St. Araille, in the Ariège, declared in his interrogation, “il a seulement expliqué au prône les motifs qui repugnent à sa conscience pour prêter le serment prescrit.”<sup>35</sup> In general, village *curés* responded candidly to interrogations, insisting that they had told their parishioners the truth, a protest which had likely made their words all the more convincing for their audience. Joseph Guraboeuf, the young priest of the village

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<sup>33</sup> A.D. Dordogne, B843-1, Sénéchaussée de Périgueux, procès contre le sieur Rey, curé de Villac, pour crime de lèse-nation, juillet 1790.

<sup>34</sup> These remarks are taken from a sampling of the statements admitted by seven parish priests: Fauroux, Fossat, Jougla, Hommeau, Monceret, Guraboeuf, and Rey; please see Appendix B for full references.

<sup>35</sup> A.D. Ariège, 11L50-5, procès contre Jougla, août 1791.



of Beaussac, in the Dordogne, declared that as far as he understood matters, the priest who replaced him would not be able to perform marriages or hear confessions.<sup>36</sup> The *curé* of Bondy (Lot-et-Garonne), Pierre Monceret, was more obstinate.<sup>37</sup> When the public prosecutor asked him if he had told his parishioners that they would be sinning if they went to the mass of a *prêtre assermenté*, Monceret at first said nothing, and then attempted to change the subject. When prompted with the question, he simply pointed out that the constitution gave him the right to express his opinion as a private individual.

While the words of parish priests undeniably affected both the actions and the opinions of their parishioners, they are not by definition expressions of *peasant* sentiment, for even village *curés* were generally of a more educated and better-informed sector of rural society. However, a small percentage of non-clerical defendants adopted a similarly defiant stance, sometimes – after 1793 – paying for it with their lives. One of the most interesting of these cases involved Bouillac Lachapelle, a *volontaire* who was temporarily residing in the market town of Terrasson (Dordogne), and whom we first met in chapter IV.<sup>38</sup> One morning in 1797, inhabitants awoke to find copies of a printed notice criticizing the government posted in several places on the public square. Lachapelle, who was in the square when the municipal officer arrived to remove the placards, verbally attacked the officer, insisting that the notices “étaient dans les vrais principes”, and that he had no right to remove them; the *volontaire* was later arrested not only for insulting a representative of public authority, but also on suspicion of having put up the placards himself. During the course of the investigation, one of the members of the local administration observed

...que ces écrits contenaient des injures atroces contre le gouvernement et provoquaient l'insurrection contre lui, que tout citoyen avait droit d'émettre son opinion par écrit ou autrement, mais que toutes les fois que cet écrit était contraire aux lois et à l'ordre social, qu'il tendait à avilir les autorités, à insurger le peuple contre elles, il était là d'avoir des magistrats d'en arrêter le cours.<sup>39</sup>

In a similar case, Olivier Roessard, another relatively transient young man, was arrested near the town of St. Giron, in the Ariège, for words which the authorities feared might cause an insurrection.<sup>40</sup> Having heard from other travellers on the road that “on voulait détruire les saints et les églises” in St. Giron, Roessard became agitated, insisting that “il ne voulait pas qu'on touche aux croix”, and that “il fallait se lever tous pour empêcher

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<sup>36</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 19L75, procès contre Guraboeuf, mars-avril 1791.

<sup>37</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17-1, procès contre Monceret, février 1792.

<sup>38</sup> A.D. Dordogne 29L18, procès contre Lachapelle, fructidor V - brumaire VI.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Extrait des registres de l'administration municipale de Terrasson, 21 fructidor V.

<sup>40</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-5, procès contre Roessard, brumaire II.



qu'on enlevât les saints, et que pour cela il fallait faire battre la caisse." What is particularly interesting about this case, however, is that, like Lachapelle, Roessard appears to have held such strong convictions that he was virtually insensible to the possible consequences of his statements. When a police commissioner came to investigate the charges, and informed Roessard that his words might earn him a death sentence, the man retorted that "peut-être avant demain il y en aurait plus de 30 de guillotins, et que ce ne serait pas eux commissaires qui l'empêcheraient d'avoir des croix. Je suis bon républicain", Roessard persisted, "mais je verserais mon sang pour la religion." Indeed, he may well have done so: his case was forwarded to the revolutionary tribunal in Paris, where unfortunately, the document trail is lost. In the case of Léonard Meynard, the peasant who spoke out in the municipal assembly, there is no doubt as to the outcome. Meynard had announced that "il aimerait mieux être guillotiné que d'entendre lire des papiers à leur ci-devant curé"; indeed, he was executed in Paris on 29 messidor II.<sup>41</sup>

As will become increasingly clear in this chapter, the right to hold an opinion was a concept which was not unknown among the peasantry. Louis Bouisson, with whom we have already been acquainted, is reputed to have said, after making a simple assertion of royalist sentiment, "qu'il voulait garder son opinion".<sup>42</sup> Charles Vivié, a *laboureur* from the hamlet of Billebaut, part of the commune of Ataux, in the Dordogne, made use of a similar concept when the opinions he put forward in the tavern of Pierre Charron, a tanner, were judged to be counter-revolutionary.<sup>43</sup> Having taken rather too much wine, Vivié was excitedly expounding upon his views that "la France ne serait tranquille que quand elle aurait un roi", and that consequently, they should name one, when several of his companions warned him that such words could get him into trouble. According to those present, Vivié had responded sullenly that "il ne croyait pas avoir tort", but that perhaps he had drunk too much – an excuse which would prove convenient during his trial. Perhaps the best illustration of opinionated defiance comes from the 1797 case of Paul Larroze, whom we first met in chapter III, a 44-year-old farmer from the tiny mountain village of Ercé, high in the Pyrenees of the department of the Ariège.<sup>44</sup> A determined royalist, Larroze had reportedly gone from house to house, and even into the public

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<sup>41</sup> A.N. W420-955, procès contre Léonard et Paule Meynard, messidor II.

<sup>42</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L61-11, procès contre Louis et Thomas Bouisson, ventôse VI - frimaire VII. See also A.N. D XXIX 6 (59), procès contre Frié *frs*, Court, *dit* Parisien, et d'autres, février 1791, in which Frié retorted, "que voulez-vous, c'est mon opinion."

<sup>43</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L41, procès contre Vivié, thermidor II.

<sup>44</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U31, procès contre Larroze, vendémiaire VI - brumaire X.



square, attempting to convince his fellow villagers that “le gouvernement actuel ne pouvait pas aller”. He cited a series of disturbing reports from the front, of military disasters and setbacks, and concluded that evidently, “on ne pouvait pas vivre sans un Roi.” Even when confronted with a possible arrest, however, Larroze remained confident in his views. “Au commencement, il était le seul qui avait soutenu son opinion à Ercé”, he is reported as having puffed, “mais maintenant tout le monde était de son avis.” Whether he was correct in this assumption or not is difficult to know; but if the eight witnesses interrogated before his trial were of the same opinion, they, at least, were not willing to risk the consequences. In the end, perhaps Larroze was not, either: before he could be sentenced, the accused escaped into the hills, and when his trial was reopened in the vastly different atmosphere of the Year X (1802), it was quickly dismissed.

### **Reading between the lines**

The fact that relatively few rural defendants maintained dissenting opinions in the face of the authorities is undoubtedly due to the spectre of punishment for those convicted of seditious speech: individuals such as Vivié and Larroze, who were determined not to abandon their views, were certainly in the minority. Nevertheless, from the historian’s perspective, such cases represent only a small proportion of those in which we can safely assume that the defendants were, indeed, guilty of the words of which they were accused. If we read between the lines, carefully examining the explanations of the defendants and attempting to ascertain “what actually happened”, we begin to see that whether or not the authorities were correct in their fears that verbalised sedition would spread like an infectious disease, they did, indeed, have a number of dissenters on their hands. In chapter IV, we dealt briefly with the excuses of defendants when we considered, from the authorities’ perspective, where exactly the crime of verbal sedition lay. As we saw, criminal court judges were forced to make difficult decisions regarding the degree of importance to be attributed to seditious speech, both in cases where the defendant had not intended to attempt to sway political opinion, and in cases where he or she did have criminal intentions, but where no disorder had resulted. In reconsidering the interrogations from the perspective of the defendants, who were attempting – in whatever way possible – to extricate themselves from blame and punishment, the question of whether or not the indicted words had in fact been uttered will become clear.

The variety of excuses put forward by defendants is in itself both revealing and fascinating. In some cases, as we have seen, individuals offered counter-evidence which



revealed that their enemies had plotted against them. In others, they succeeded in convincing the judge, if not always the historian, that their denunciation had been the result of a misunderstanding. In some of these, however, defendants put forward such preposterous and unconvincing excuses that it is difficult for the historian to imagine that the accusation is untrue. Lacking both familiarity with the judicial system and experience in dealing with educated authorities in general, rural defendants were sometimes comically naïve and candid in their attempts to convince the authorities of their innocence. In multiple instances, peasants simply denied every charge, in spite of the fact that dozens of witnesses had provided extremely similar accounts of the incidents. This was the case, for example, of 18-year-old Joseph Bouisson, who was brought before the judicial authorities of the Ariège on charges of insults to the national guards and complicity in royalist actions.<sup>45</sup> In his interrogation, Bouisson responded with a flat “no” to every question, insisting that he did not remember any of the events mentioned. In frustration, the interrogator finally asked him: “que répondez-vous aux dépositions des témoins qui affirment le contraire de vos réponses?” Bouisson’s amusing answer was in fact transcribed as an interrogative: “qu’ils se sont trompés?”<sup>46</sup> In another case, the response was even more absurd. Louis Moullan, a young *volontaire* who was accused in 1796 of having caroused about the streets of Lézat, maintained that although he had shouted “vive la Vendée” along with the others, he himself had been referring to “le plaisir d’aller le défendre”.<sup>47</sup> Granted, both of these defendants were barely adults, but Sicaire Linard, the secretary of the municipality of Léguilhac de l’Auche, in the Dordogne, could not claim the same handicap. Linard was accused of having falsely publicised an imaginary decree according to which sharecroppers were no longer required to pay dues to their landlords. When he was asked repeatedly to produce the decree, Linard stalled for time, in the end suggesting that perhaps the placard had been taken down from the church door, that someone had stolen it from his residence, or – most preposterously – that it had been eaten by rats.<sup>48</sup>

In each of these three cases, the weakness of the defendants’ excuses makes it more than likely that they were, in fact, guilty of having made the statements of which they were accused. True, each was acquitted: the jury in Foix concluded that Bouisson had made the statements but without criminal intentions, and Louis Moullan benefited from

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<sup>45</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L61-11, procès contre Louis et Thomas Bouisson, ventôse VI - frimaire VII.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, interrogation, 16 ventôse VI.

<sup>47</sup> A.D. Ariège 14L14-1, procès contre Peyronnel et d’autres, nivôse IV, witness no. 42.

<sup>48</sup> A.D. Dordogne, B843-2, procès contre Linard, août-septembre 1790.



the fact that there were multiple defendants, most of whom faced more serious charges than he. The incident involving Linard was simply never pursued, having taken place in 1790, before the establishment of the penal code; he merely lost his position as secretary and, doubtless, the respect of some of the villagers. However, we are less interested in criminal intentions and violent reactions than in the communication of political ideas. There are numerous cases in which the defendant conceded, to some extent, that he or she had made the indicted statements, but pleaded that it had been “non méchamment”, or that the words had not been intended in the way in which they were taken. Yet the fact remains that whether intentional or not, the expression of ideas and opinions invited reflection and thus had the potential to affect public opinion, regardless of the outcome of the trial. Henri Lagonde, a young *cultivateur* from the village of Manotte, in the Lot-et-Garonne, maintained that while it was true that he had hummed the tune of the *Reveil du peuple*, to the dismay of many of those within earshot, “que son intention n’était point de fâcher personne; qu’il a fredonné ledit air, comme il aurait fredonné tout autre.”<sup>49</sup> The result, regardless of Lagonde’s intention, was that the words had hung in the air, forcing listeners to reflect upon their political circumstances. Respondents who insisted that they had simply repeated what they had heard elsewhere were also, for the most part, acquitted of criminal intentions, but again, the effect on the audience was the same. Such was the case with Joseph Delrieu, the cook we met previously who had spent an evening in the taverns of Monflanquin (Lot-et-Garonne), relating news he had heard in the nearby town of Villeneuve.<sup>50</sup> His listeners, largely peasants from the surrounding area who had come to Monflanquin on business, were understandably dismayed by the news that “à Villeneuve, l’on donnait six livres en assignats pour vingt piastres d’un sol”<sup>51</sup>, regardless of Delrieu’s plea that he had merely passed on the information.

Of all the cases in which defendants basically argued that they had not intended to speak seditiously, the most common single excuse was that of drunkenness. As we have remarked on several occasions now, the element of alcohol was often invoked, either by witnesses or by the accused, as an excuse for objectionable words which, defendants maintained, would not have otherwise been stated in public. The fact that so many of the extant court cases concern words said in places of sociability, such as taverns and

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<sup>49</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L237-115, procès contre Lagonde et sa tante la veuve Lamothe, thermidor V.

<sup>50</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L50-1 and 2L98-29, procès contre Delrieu, août 1793 - pluviôse II.

<sup>51</sup> “Sol” is an Occitan variant of “sou”. The word “piastre”, while still in use today as the monetary unit of several middle eastern countries, was, in revolutionary France, a common term which denoted a physical piece of currency. Thus, Delrieu meant twenty one-*sou* pieces.



fairgrounds, partially explains this connection between drink and the expression of political opinion. However, public drunkenness also represented a convenient excuse for those who had said too much. Indeed, from the readiness with which defendants responded that they had been drunk – often as soon as they were asked where they were on the night mentioned in the accusation, and before any mention of wrongdoing – it seems likely that rural citizens were well aware that such an excuse meant an easy acquittal. For example, in the case of Delrieu described above, the cook immediately supplied the information that he had already been drunk upon arriving at the tavern in question, having been drinking at several other inns earlier that evening.<sup>52</sup> Léon Lafont, one of the young artisans accused, along with Jean Vidalot, of having stirred up trouble in the town of Tarascon on 28 messidor V, was confident that his excuse of intoxication would clear his name:

...qu'il est vrai qu'un soir ne sachant lequel il était allé boire avec quelques-uns de ses camarades, qu'il sortit si soulé de vin, qu'il ne se rappelle pas d'avoir chanté les chansons ni tenu les propos qu'on lui impute; que supposant que cela soit vrai, il est d'autant plus excusable qu'il ne savait ce qu'il faisait, et qu'il n'avait aucune mauvaise intention, que s'il se fut connu, il n'aurait certainement pas tenu de pareils propos, supposant qu'ils soient vrais.<sup>53</sup>

In the end, he was correct: although the jury believed that he had participated “dans l'intention d'une provocation au rétablissement de la royauté”, he was acquitted due to “circonstances atténuantes” – a phrase which nearly always, in rural cases, referred to drunkenness. The excuse put forward by Bonis, *dit* Pékin, a *marchand de route* accused of having stood at the entrance to the village of Monpazier, in the Dordogne, shouting “vive le roi” and that “il se foutait de la République”, is similar:

...qu'en supposant qu'il lui soit arrivé de dire la moindre chose contre la république, ou les lois, il fallait qu'il fut tout à fait ivre; qu'il connaît trop bien la peine à laquelle il se serait exposé, s'il eût été assez imprudent de s'exhaler en mauvais propos contre l'ordre actuel des choses.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, Pékin went one step further, making sure that the authorities realised that he knew perfectly well what the consequences were, and that he had no intention of being caught up in a seditious speech trial. Like those who put forward preposterous excuses or insisted that they “hadn't meant it”, the obvious calculations on the part of individuals such as Delrieu, Lafont and Bonis merely serve, for the historian at least, to incriminate them further.

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<sup>52</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L50-1 and 2L98-29, procès contre Delrieu; interrogation, 7 frimaire II.

<sup>53</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d'autres, interrogation of Léon Lafont, *dit* Germini, 22 ans, boulanger, habitant de Tarascon, 1 brumaire VI.

<sup>54</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L58-494, Tribunal révolutionnaire, procès contre Bonis, *dit* Pékin, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires, interrogation, 18 fructidor VII.



Thus, while the indicted statements themselves require careful reading and consideration of the context in which they were spoken, they do, indeed, represent a source of political opinion. In the cases considered above, where defendants were acquitted because of their claim to have been drunk at the time, it seems more likely than not that the denouncers had been telling the truth: after all, if ever one's dissatisfaction with the "ordre actuel des choses" were to emerge, the addition of alcohol to the equation would seem a likely catalyst. Moreover, even in instances where defendants insisted that they had had no criminal intentions in putting forward seditious political opinions, the effect upon the audience was nevertheless the same. True, as we have seen, some defendants succeeded in convincing the court that the charges against them were made by vengeful or malicious individuals, and often it can be shown that the corroborating witness accounts were also the result of dishonesty. However, I would argue that even instances such as these indicate a certain level of politicization in the village. On the one hand, it is possible that the defendant did, in fact, make the statements, and that the vengefulness of which he or she accused the denouncer lay in that person's decision to go to the authorities, rather than to remain silent. On the other hand, if the defendant spoke the truth and the denouncer had indeed invented the imputation, that individual – also a member of the rural community – had still known what phrases to use in order to gain the authorities' attention, demonstrating an awareness of the political issues at stake. Considering that, as the legislators maintained, the real danger lay with the publicity of seditious statements, any political ideas or opinions put forward were potentially damaging to public opinion, including those of the denouncer.

### Reactions from Witnesses and Bystanders

Although indicted statements may, with careful consideration, be taken as indications of political opinion, seditious speech trials contain another, unexpected source of peasant thought: the reactions of witnesses and bystanders, as recorded in the depositions of those who were present. Such statements, while requiring the same care in interpretation as the words of the defendant, are more rare: in most cases, witness testimonies are short and to the point, and divulge no more about personal opinions than absolutely necessary. However, in those instances where witness reflections are recorded, their spontaneity and sincerity make them more revealing than the indicted statements we have examined thus far. The honest reactions of witnesses and bystanders demonstrate that



Figure 5-1



David Wilkie, *Village Politicians* (1806).

Source:

Private Collection, Earl of Mansfield, England. Reproduced from John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (Cambridge, 1980), p.115.



verbal dissent did (as the authorities feared) have a concrete effect on those who heard it. On the other hand, as we shall see in the third and final section of this chapter, listeners were not (as the authorities assumed) blindly affected by the statements of others. Different types of information from different sources were evaluated based on numerous factors, including the reliability and reputation of the speaker, the existence of corroborating official information, and the listener's own experience, resulting in rural citizens drawing their own conclusions and forming political opinions which were more complex than has previously been realised. Before we bring competing information into the equation, however, let us first examine what we can discern of peasant reaction to local speakers of sedition.

### **Rural audiences, rural reactions**

The indirectly revealed opinions and reactions which will be analysed in the following pages have been taken entirely from witness depositions recorded during the preparation of actual trials. Accustomed to functioning in a largely oral world, early modern villagers had a relatively greater capacity to remember and recount the statements of individuals as well as the ensuing discussions. As such, these testimonies often included a relation of statements made in retort to the seditious speech, either by the witnesses themselves or by other individuals who were present: their accounts are remarkably rich with echoes of conversations that had taken place days or even weeks earlier.<sup>55</sup> At other times, witnesses gave indications of their own opinions of the incident, or of the general feeling in the village with regard to the defendant or his words. Indeed, it is the statements of the witnesses which truly allow us to eavesdrop on conversations long since finished, and as such, they are perhaps the most valuable component of the trial archives.

Yet who were these witnesses, and who were the members of the public whose reactions they described? These questions can be easily answered, for trial depositions usually indicate the profession, age, and place of residence of each witness. As a result, in any case for which this information has been recorded, we can learn a great deal about the individuals whose statements either defended the accused or signed the death warrant, and we may guess at the effect the indicted words might have had in the surrounding countryside. In order to envision the audience present in a given instance, we must return

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<sup>55</sup> Jeanne Reynaud, for example, the fourth witness in the trial against Jacques Murat, *dit* Lapeycherie, reported verbatim a conversation which had taken place eight days earlier, matching the other testimonies, even though she said "c'est tout ce que le déclarant entendit étant occupée aux soins de son ménage et ne faisant pas beaucoup attention à ce qui se disait." A.D. Dordogne, 24L39, déposition 16 nivôse II.



to the various *lieux de rencontre* which were described in chapter I. Episodes which took place on the *place publique* on Sunday after church, for example, or during an assembly for recruitment, were invariably witnessed by many if not all of the local inhabitants. Fourteen individuals testified to having witnessed the anti-constitutional words of Pierre Monceret, the *curé* of Bondy, in the Lot-et-Garonne,<sup>56</sup> and the counter-revolutionary shouts of Jean Vidalot and his cohorts were apparently heard by seventy-nine members of the community of Niaux, in the Ariège.<sup>57</sup> A total of thirty-one witnesses testified to Jacques Defis' attempt to prevent individuals from volunteering for the army in Vernajoul,<sup>58</sup> and in the analogous case of Gilles Anel and Marcel Dedieu, of Taurignan-Vieux (Ariège), eighty depositions were taken.<sup>59</sup>

Even in circumstances where fewer individuals were present, the professions and places of residence of those individuals mark them as members of the rural community. As described in chapter III, the rural character of the audience was a key criterion for including cases in the sample: instances of seditious speech which occurred in larger towns were admitted only where a significant number of those present had been visiting from the surrounding countryside. Such was the case, for example, in the trial of Jean Casse, *dit* Lartigue, a farmer from the village of St. Cirac (Ariège), who was accused of having made counter-revolutionary remarks in the nearby town of Tarascon.<sup>60</sup> Lartigue had left his house at five o'clock in the morning on 2 prairial IV, and walked for three hours in order to keep an eight o'clock appointment with a notary regarding a farming lease for a field adjoining his land. Having completed his business by 8:30 a.m., Lartigue then spent the entire rest of the day in various inns and taverns, drinking himself silly and making impolitic remarks, finally falling asleep in a room at the widow Dupeyrou's boarding house. Although some of the individuals interviewed by the authorities were from Tarascon itself, nearly half were peasants who, like Lartigue himself, had been in town on business. Indeed, it was with those individuals that the accused had spent his time: one of the *aubergistes* even remembered that Lartigue had dined "avec deux hommes de son pays".<sup>61</sup>

In addition to age, profession, and place of residence, depositions contain one

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<sup>56</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17-1, procès contre Monceret, février 1792.

<sup>57</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d'autres, messidor V-brumaire VI.

<sup>58</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L35-1, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Jacques Defis, cultivateur, pour entrave à la levée des hommes, août 1793.

<sup>59</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-7, procès contre Anel et Dedieu, août 1793 - frimaire II.

<sup>60</sup> A.D. Ariège, 13L24-8, procès contre Casse, *dit* Lartigue, prairial IV.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, witness no. 10, Marie Mourens, 19 ans.



further piece of information which allows us to describe the public: the signature of the witness or, in its place, a note to the effect that the witness was unable to sign. The ability to sign one's name has long been considered an indication of basic literacy, and while its accuracy has been debated in recent years, it remains a useful gauge in circumstances such as these.<sup>62</sup> Of the trials in which witnesses were requested to sign their depositions, many indicate a relatively low level of literacy, a fact which confirms the rural character of the crowd in incidents of seditious speech included in this study. In the trial against Antoine Layrix and his comrades, *laboureurs* and *artisans* from the village of Labastide-de-Gardeneraux (Ariège) accused of inciting counter-revolutionary gatherings, fifteen of the twenty-two witnesses were unable to sign their deposition. All of the witnesses were from the village, but it is worth noting that among the seven whom we might consider literate, we find a mix of older farmers – four *laboureurs* including the mayor and the *procureur* of the commune – and skilled artisans: a weaver, a shoemaker, a carpenter.<sup>63</sup> In the case against Pierre-Elie Lasescuras, the parish priest of Sorges (Dordogne), an overwhelming majority of the witnesses – 41 out of 42 – appear to have been illiterate.<sup>64</sup> Some cases, however, while remaining rural in context, show a higher proportion of signatures. In the tiny village of Ercé, for example, nestled high in the Pyrenees of the Ariège, seven of the eight witnesses who testified against Paul Larroze in Year V were able to sign their names.<sup>65</sup> Mostly described as *cultivateurs*, this more literate group also included an *homme de loi*, as well as a tailor and a weaver, although each witness was resident in or near the village of Ercé. Such disproportionate indications of literacy among rural citizens may have indicated a predisposition among the more articulate sector of the countryside to participate in political business; for our purposes, however, the audience remains undeniably “rural”.

### Prudence in opinion: disapproval and dissuasion in witness statements

Thus, any responses indicated by witnesses can safely be assumed to represent village reaction to counter-revolutionary remarks. Like the excuses offered by defendants,

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<sup>62</sup> See the discussion of the study by Louis Maggiolo, chapter I, note 51. Note that the debate centres upon whether or not a signature demonstrates literacy; it is virtually unchallenged that being unable to even sign one's name indicates illiteracy. In the argument that follows, it is the demonstration of illiteracy which is key.

<sup>63</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L35-2, procès contre Layrix et d'autres, août-sept 1793. Those who could not sign were largely farmers, day-labourers in particular, as well as another weaver and a blacksmith.

<sup>64</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L63, procès contre Lasescuras, brumaire II.

<sup>65</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U31, procès contre Larroze, vendémiaire VI - brumaire X.



however, the opinions volunteered by witnesses tend to be somewhat predictable in content. It is virtually unimaginable, after all, that any witness would admit candidly to agreeing with the seditious utterances at the heart of the trial. Indeed, by definition, witnesses who sided with the accused ceased being witnesses and took on the unenviable identity of defendants. As a result, the majority of explicit statements of witness opinion express attitudes which the authorities would have found unobjectionable. At times, even the vocabulary used by witnesses appears consciously consistent with revolutionary ideology. Placards are “incendiaires” and culprits are “acharnés”, seditious activity is “suspecte” and the resulting disorder is “affreux”. More often, however, witnesses exercised prudence by making remarks which appear tailor-made for the task of convincing the interrogator that their own loyalty to the regime was beyond reproach.

Witnesses who included a description of their own response in their depositions tended to stress the fact that they had “done the right thing”. Jean Liron, a *cabaretier* in the market town of Monpazier, in the Dordogne, testified that when one of his clients, a certain Bonis, *dit* Pékin, began shouting “vive le roi”, he asked him to leave.<sup>66</sup> In other cases, patriotic villagers described how they had defiantly refused to play along with counter-revolutionary merriment. Pierre André, a horse-dealer travelling through Cancon (Lot-et-Garonne), stated that when he noticed that the group in question at the inn was singing “chansons inciviques”, he refused to sit at the same table.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Raimond Dassès, a farmer from the countryside near Rieux (Haute-Garonne), was forced by his *civisme* to spoil the fun of the agitators who were drinking at the same inn, by removing the white cockade they had pinned to his tunic.<sup>68</sup> Even in cases where witnesses testified that they had *not* heard the statements described in the accusation, the deposition represented an opportunity for them to disconnect themselves clearly from any blame. Sicaire Brachet, the brother-in-law of a man accused of royalist speech, piped up that “s’il avait entendu tenir ce propos à son beau-frère il l’aurait dénoncé comme un contre-révolutionnaire pour qu’il fût puni comme tel.”<sup>69</sup> By far the most exemplary case, however, is that against Michel Rouge, *dit* Coussa, one of a group of artisans accused of counter-revolutionary shouts in the town of Pamiers (Ariège), which was first introduced in chapter III.<sup>70</sup> Of the fifty-eight witnesses called to testify in the trial, not one admitted

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<sup>66</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L58-494, procès contre Bonis, *dit* Pékin, witness no. 1, déposition 15 fructidor VII.

<sup>67</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-9, procès contre Lamartigne, germinal II, witness no. 18.

<sup>68</sup> A.N. D XXIX 6 (59), procès contre Frié *fils*, Court, *dit* Parisien, et d’autres, février 1791, witness no.8.

<sup>69</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L40, procès contre Dartenset, floréal II, witness no. 1.

<sup>70</sup> A.D. Ariège, 14L43-12, procès contre Rouge, *dit* Coussa, frimaire V.



to having heard Coussa yell “vive le roi” on the night of 1<sup>st</sup> vendémiaire V. Nevertheless, seven people pointed out in their brief interview that if they had heard such shouts, they would have felt it was their “devoir républicain” to denounce the culprits.<sup>71</sup>

For the same reason which led witnesses to frame their depositions with their own protection in mind, it follows that most of the opinions reported indirectly in seditious trials consisted, essentially, in disapproval or condemnation of the indicted statements. However, the fact that witness depositions contain not only their own reproachful comments, but also the indignant retorts of other bystanders, leads us to conclude that disagreement with seditious remarks was perhaps less a question of appearing zealous before the authorities, than it was an actual indication of disagreement. The simplest of these remarks consisted of blunt statements of disapproval. It was relatively common, for example, for one or more individuals at the scene of an incident to reproach the speaker directly, saying variously that they shouldn’t speak that way, that they should be quiet, or that their words were blameworthy. Gabriel Labouneilhe, a wigmaker from Bergerac, was in a tavern singing a song which had “vive le roi” as part of the refrain, when Jean Chavane, one of the listeners, pointed out to him “combien ce propos était reprehensible”; according to other witnesses, Chavane’s words succeeded in silencing Labouneilhe.<sup>72</sup> In a similar instance, Jean-Louis Casaux, *dit* Labotte, a farmer from the village of St. Quirc (Ariège), and his companions were reprimanded for the drunken exclamations, “à bas la République, à bas les patriotes; vive les chouans!” St. Quirc was a small place, however, and this time there were multiple objections: many people were heard to mutter, or so the witnesses reported, that “ceux qui avaient proféré ces cris avaient bien tort”, and one individual named Amoureux confronted Labotte and his companions, telling them that “ils devaient se taire et ne pas parler ainsi.”<sup>73</sup>

The censoring comments of virtuous bystanders were not always so detached, however. Often the reproaches of listeners took on a moralistic tone, and implied that the

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* Witnesses 27 (Catherine Carrière, aubergiste) and 29 (Antoine Morliers, notaire) said that if they had heard something so seditious, they would have denounced the culprits; witness 32 (Antoine Ribante, cultivateur) is the individual who boasted about his “devoir républicain”, just as witness 55 (Jean Boyer, aubergiste) cited his “civisme” in the matter. Witness 44, the juge de paix, intoned, “s’il eût entendu un pareil délit qu’on le lui eût dénoncé ou que la rumeur publique l’en eût informé”, he would have brought a trial against the accused, and witness 45, the president of the district council, similarly attested that he would have done his duty. Witness 52 (Jeanne Tissière, aubergiste), finally, put the matter in honest terms: “si elle en avait entendu,” she testified, “elle aurait été capable de le dénoncer aux autorités constituées, pour arrêter le scandale d’une pareille conduite.”

<sup>72</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L46-279, procès contre Labouneilhe, floréal IV, witnesses no. 1 and 2.

<sup>73</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U28, procès contre Casaux, *dit* Labotte *fils*, et d’autres, messidor VII - messidor IX, witnesses no. 2 and 10.



speakers were shamefully out of line. At the time of the nocturnal exclamations of Jean Vidalot and his cohorts, in the town of Tarascon, a witness overheard one man, whose sleep had undoubtedly been disturbed, shouting from his window, "laissez-vous, retirez-vous, il est indigne de chanter ces chansons!"<sup>74</sup> In a similar instance, the agitator Antoine Layrix was reprimanded by Teulié, a well-respected local physician. As reported by a 30-year-old farm labourer named François Lauriol, Teulié "lui représenta l'indécence de ses discours et lui demanda s'il croyait être le président de la nation." According to other bystanders, Layrix ignored Teulié's remarks, continuing in much the same fashion as before. In the end, however, it would be the physician who would have the last laugh: Layrix and his cohorts were brought to trial, and as one of the ringleaders, Layrix was deported to French Guyana.<sup>75</sup> In a different case, Charles Dantin, a captain in the army, echoed Teulié's comments about the inappropriateness of seditious speech in his remarks to Marcel Lafont, who had interrupted the playing of the revolutionary anthem "ça ira" during a military parade in Tarascon with the words, "à bas ça ira, ça n'ira pas." It was not his place, Dantin reportedly said, to countermand the playing of the song; Lafont was arrested, but succeeded in defeating the evidence against him.<sup>76</sup> In the trial against Pierre Gauthier, finally, one witness got the last word when he said biting, "tu ferais mieux de rester dans ta commune et de ne pas venir troubler la nôtre, qui est tranquille."<sup>77</sup>

In some instances, listeners augmented their arguments against those who had made seditious statements by pointing out that the laws were not in their favour. When Jean Bernard, *dit* Biotte, the farmer from Vereilhac whom we met earlier, made his memorable comments about the uselessness of placards which concerned the *assignats* and then proceeded to remove them, a number of people in the crowd told him "qu'il ne devait pas enlever les lois, vue que la municipalité avait fait des défences réitérées, et même des arrêtés", and that therefore, "il courrait des risques à cet enlèvement."<sup>78</sup> The mayor of Ataux used the same threatening tones when he approached Charles Vivié, the farmer from Billebaut who was determined to express his view that "France needed a king": the mayor told Vivié "qu'il se perdait, et que la loi était expresse là-dessus."<sup>79</sup> Perhaps the most

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<sup>74</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d'autres, messidor V-brumaire VI, witnesses no. 4 (dossier 1).

<sup>75</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L35-2, procès contre Layrix et d'autres, août-sept 1793. See also Marty, *Trois localités*, pp. 212-35.

<sup>76</sup> A.D. Ariège, 13L31-1, Tribunal correctionnel de Tarascon, procès contre Marcel Lafont, écrivain-notaire, pour propos séditieux, fructidor V - vendémiaire VI, witness no. 2.

<sup>77</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, procès contre Gauthier, *dit* Viroulet, germinal II.

<sup>78</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L42, procès contre Bernard, *dit* Biotte, pluviôse II, see esp. witnesses no. 2 and 10.

<sup>79</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L41, procès contre Vivié, thermidor II, witness no. 3.



interesting example of such reprimanding, however, is to be found in the case against Bernard Darbus Satouret, a peasant accused of statements crafted to discredit the *assignats* in the minds of his fellow villagers in Lahitte (Hautes-Pyrénées).<sup>80</sup> In order to bolster his opinions, Satouret claimed that he had seen a decree in the nearby village of Maubourguet which confirmed that citizens could go back to using hard currency as they had in the past. However, his listeners did not believe his story, and one, another farmer named Jean Terrade Camille, apprised Satouret that if that decree did not arrive, he should watch out for the *comité de surveillance*, because “s’il y a des lois”, he would be punished.<sup>81</sup>

In each of these cases, the witnesses’ comments contain an underlying warning: if the speaker continued to express seditious ideas in public, he ran the risk of the guillotine. In many instances, the same threat is clearly verbalised. In the case against Pierre Grelety, the unemployed teacher arrested near Bergerac for royalist speech, one of the individuals present warned him that “s’il continuait à tenir de pareils propos, il se ferait renfermer.”<sup>82</sup> Often, the individuals who pointed out the seriousness of the speaker’s transgression were also those who were incensed enough to make the denunciation themselves. Jean-Pierre Danflous, for example, a *marchand de bois* from St. Sulpice, in the Haute-Garonne, was present when the priest Darbas made his reprehensible remarks about the religious policy of the National Assembly. As Darbas was a guest in his brother-in-law’s house, Danflous did not wish to create a scene; however, he did indicate to the priest that “s’il continuait de parler davantage contre la Constitution il se verrait forcé de le dénoncer en justice, attendu qu’il y était obligé par la loi de son serment, et comme ami de la Constitution.”<sup>83</sup> In the case introduced above, in which Teulié, the *officier de santé* of Lapenne, near Mirepoix (Ariège), reprimanded Antoine Layrix for the “indecentcy” of his statements, the physician was so angry at how his comment had been ignored that he muttered “qu’il se rappellerait de lui”; according to one of the witnesses for the trial, it was Teulié, in the end, who denounced the group of malcontents.<sup>84</sup> While such accounts of republican zeal undoubtedly pleased the authorities charged with taking down witness depositions, they also reveal the hostile stance of many bystanders.

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<sup>80</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L justice non-côtée (pluviôse-fructôse III), procès contre Bernard Darbus Satouret, cultivateur, pour propos tendant à discréditer les assignats, nivôse - germinal II.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L57-489, procès contre Grelety, fructidor VII, witness no. 2.

<sup>83</sup> A.N. D XXIX 6, Comité des Rapports, Information contre le Sieur Darbas prêtre inconstitutionnel, witness no. 1, 17 août 1791.

<sup>84</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L35-2, procès contre Layrix et d’autres, août-sept 1793, witness no. 12.



### **Opposing views: listeners double the bid**

The cases we have just seen, in which listeners cited the law in support of their condemnations of seditious statements made in public, lead us to review some of the more sophisticated and intelligent reactions of rural audiences. Like witnesses' own descriptions of their disapproval and their efforts to dissuade malcontents, the following stances are unlikely to have drawn negative attention upon the individual in question; nevertheless, the thoughtfulness with which witnesses and bystanders expressed their disagreement with counter-revolutionary remarks merits consideration. Peasants who were witness to statements concerning political issues did not simply swallow them whole: as has been argued throughout, they reflected upon them, questioned them, and came to their own conclusions. Marie Meyniel, who was witness to the statements of Chaussonnel, the beggar whose trial was described at the start of this study, listened for awhile before confronting the speaker, demanding to know "où est-ce qu'il avait appris ces notions"; Chaussonnel replied that he had heard the information at a political club meeting.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, some of the women in the community of Mas-d'Azil (Ariège), who overheard Marion Grenier's reports of terrible defeats and impending doom for the Republic, demanded more proof. Jeanne Fichon, for example, wanted to know "quelles étaient les nouvelles qui annonçaient ces malheurs", to which Grenier cited the names of two nearby towns, where she had supposedly heard the information. However, Fichon's companion, Catherine Laffont, was not so easily convinced, and pressed the matter, saying that she had not heard anything like that, at which point Grenier became defensive, retorting that she must have been out of town.<sup>86</sup>

Where listeners were either better informed or simply more perceptive, they put harder questions to speakers of seditious words. In some cases, witnesses went so far as to call the bluff of would-be spreaders of false news, in effect drastically curtailing the influence of their words on the rest of the audience. In the case of Bernard Satouret, the defendant attempted to lend more credence to his words by adding that the decree he had seen had been signed by the municipal officers of Maubourguet; unfortunately for him, a bystander quickly pointed out that municipal officers were not in the habit of signing decrees, which immediately cast doubt on his entire story.<sup>87</sup> The attempt of Thomas

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<sup>85</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-6 and 2L98-23, procès contre Chaussonnel, floréal II, witness no. 2.

<sup>86</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U22, procès contre Grenier, dite Cauredon, fructidor VII - vendémiaire VIII, witnesses no. 2 and 3.

<sup>87</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L justice non-côtée, procès contre Satouret, nivôse - germinal II, witness no.8.



Bordas, the weaver from the Dordogne whom we have met before, to convince his listeners that their *assignats* were worthless, was similarly called up short by a citizen from Ribérac, who was passing through the village, and whose words were reported by the tailor Jean Colinel. Bordas had reportedly been raving that the only *assignats* worth keeping were the ones worth six *sous*, because they bore the image of the king, when the stranger stepped forward and pointed out, “vous ne voulez cependant pas les donner”, to which Bordas was forced to mutter that he preferred to keep them in order to burn them.<sup>88</sup> The case against Sicaire Linard, finally, is positively risible for the ability of bystanders to cast doubt upon seditious activity. As previously recounted, Linard, the secretary of the commune of Léguilhac de l’Auche, had attempted to argue that the reason he could not produce the papers he had supposedly received was that someone had stolen them from his house. When the *procureur syndic* of the village exclaimed in frustration, “qui voulez-vous qui vous l’ait pris”, Linard mulishly persisted that “on pourrait bien le lui avoir pris pour le duper.” Linard had, in fact, been duped: by the individuals in the crowd who were perceptive enough to see through his deception.<sup>89</sup>

Indeed, some witnesses did go as far as to accuse speakers of sedition of lying to the people. Marie Meyniel, for example, was not satisfied by the beggar Chaussonnel’s explanation that he had heard the news he reported at a political society meeting: according to another bystander, sharecropper Jean Labardieu, she had retorted “qu’il était un aristocrate et qu’il n’avait pas pu apprendre tout cela au club.”<sup>90</sup> Other cases described above ended with similar results. Pierre Dufour, who overheard the ex-teacher Grelety saying that there were 15,000 soldiers hidden at the port at Bordeaux, that a king had already been named and that he would be crowned in Lyon on 20 August 1799, responded vehemently, “que c’était des faussetés et qu’il ne fallait pas faire courir des bruits semblables.”<sup>91</sup> Witnesses to the words of Antoine Layrix and his cohorts responded similarly, saying that “tout cela n’était que des fadaïses, et qu’il ne fallait point écouter.”<sup>92</sup> In a village near Périgueux, a servant named Jacques Murat, *dit* Lapeycherie, was arrested in 1794 for spreading false news. His efforts failed, however, when he met the brothers Bordas, both of whom were named Jean, and who were about to leave together for the

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<sup>88</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L45-260, procès contre Bordas, pluviôse IV, witness no. 13.

<sup>89</sup> A.D. Dordogne, B843-2, procès contre Linard, août-septembre 1790, witness no. 17.

<sup>90</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-6 and 2L98-23, procès contre Chaussonnel, floréal II, witness no. 5.

<sup>91</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L57-489, procès contre Grelety, fructidor VII, witness no. 2.

<sup>92</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L35-2, procès contre Layrix et d’autres, août-sept 1793, witness no. 17. “Fadaïse” may be defined as “propos plat et sot; plaisanterie; chose insignifiante, dépourvue d’intérêt”.



front. Lapeycherie's attempts to convince them that, among other things, there were between two and three hundred English ships ready to sail for the Vendée, and that the brother of the dead king was soon to be crowned in Toulon, were met with defiance. "Tous ces propos [sont] faux", said the younger of the two brothers; "ils n'en [sont] point effrayés, et s'il [est] nécessaire, ils [sont] prêts à marcher, l'un et l'autre."<sup>93</sup> Dominique Moules, the defrocked priest of Aurensan (Hautes-Pyrénées), was even more confident in his rebuff of Cassaigne père's attempt to relate news of terrible defeats in the Vendée. "Il n'en croyait rien", he had said; "que lui qui lisait les nouvelles n'avait vu aucun rapport relatif à ce que Cassaigne disait, et que celui-ci faisait très mal de débiter ainsi de fausses nouvelles."<sup>94</sup>

For the purposes of this study, however, the most interesting type of witness rebuke is to be found in cases where the listener first made clear his disagreement with the seditious words, before going on to state his own position on the matter. Such responses are more complex and more revealing than those reactions which simply indicated disapproval, for they show that peasants made up their own minds in an independent manner, participating intelligently in political discussions. Several examples will illustrate this point. Jean Étève, a farmer who testified in the case against the ex-noble Jean de Malet, reportedly stood firm in his opinion of the current policies of the government.<sup>95</sup> He had been returning from the fair at Génis (Dordogne), to his place of residence in the village of Doussac, when he met Malet and began speaking of current affairs. In the course of this discussion, Étève stated that he believed that land rents would never again be paid, to which Malet responded "qu'il le verrait bien: que ceux qui croient qu'on en payerait plus de rentes se trompaient très fort." Both men were resolute: "le déposant", the testimony reads, "soutint avec fermeté son système, et Malet le sien." In another case – the case of the drunken farmer, Lartigue, who had come into Tarascon on business – the poor man had said to anyone who would listen that "depuis que nous sommes en République, les représentants du peuple se sont enrichis, et que lui s'était ruiné, puisqu'on lui avait prix deux mulets." One well-meaning bystander, a saddler named François Rous, attempted to set the miserable drunk straight. "Il se ferait enfermer en parlant ainsi", Rous wisely counselled him; rather than speaking out against the Republic, "il devait s'adresser

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<sup>93</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L39, procès contre Murat, *dit* Lapeycherie, witness no. 3, déposition 16 nivôse II.

<sup>94</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée, procès contre Cassaigne père, pluviôse II, witness no.5.

<sup>95</sup> *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), procès contre Malet, brumaire II; vol. 1, pp.265-80, witness no. 2.



à ceux qui lui avaient pris les mulets pour se faire payer.”<sup>96</sup> The municipal officers of the village of Marsillac, in the Dordogne, showed a particular level-headedness when they rebuked the parish priest for his seditious words: “la guerre était assez sur les frontières”, they said, “sans l’allumer à l’intérieur.”<sup>97</sup>

In fact, the theme of the war effort in general elicited remarkably pro-revolutionary comments from patriotic peasant witnesses. When Jean de Malet made his cruel remark about the *volontaires*’ burning clothes keeping them warm, one indignant witness retorted with optimism, “qu’il pourrait se tromper, que la Convention prendrait bien des mesures pour empêcher ce désordre”.<sup>98</sup> In the case against the physician Cassaigne père, the defendant tried an original tack with a female innkeeper: if the recruitment process continued unobstructed, Cassaigne reportedly argued, she would lose much of her clientele, and therefore, “par son intérêt particulier, elle devrait s’y opposer.” The *aubergiste* was not to be swayed, however: “elle s’en donnerait bien garde”, she retorted; “au contraire, aimant trop la patrie elle les y encouragerait, et y irait elle même.” Cassaigne could only mutter in response that she was crazy, and that she did not know what she was saying.<sup>99</sup> The response of one witness in the case of Michel Rousse, *dit* Coussa, was similar: “si la nation nous demandait, il fallait tous voler à son secours”, touted farmer Paul Vidal, to which Coussa retorted that since Vidal felt that way, they should send him to the front.<sup>100</sup> In one final example, the deserters Jean Meunier and Jean Denave faced considerable resistance to their counter-revolutionary statements in an inn in the town of Agen, in August 1793.<sup>101</sup> Speaking to young rural volunteers who had arrived in town in order to depart with their battalion, Denave said menacingly, “je ne voudrais pas à votre place être commandé par un tas de paysans qui ne savent pas distinguer leur main droite d’avec la gauche”; some soldiers, he said, would not show up if the commanding officer was incompetent. Jean Delbrel, one of the witnesses, pointed out that such behaviour would be against the law, “puisque’il y avait un décret qui défendait à tout soldat d’abandonner son drapeau”, and Jean Godeau, another volunteer, responded to the first part of Denave’s statement, bravely asserting “que la Nation serait assez juste

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<sup>96</sup> A.D. Ariège, 13L24-8, procès contre Casse, *dit* Lartigue, prairial IV, witness no. 11, François Rous, bourrelier, habitant des environs de Tarascon.

<sup>97</sup> A.N. W 420, dossier 955, procès contre Broliat, floréal II.

<sup>98</sup> *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), procès contre Malet, brumaire II; vol. 1, pp.265-80, denunciation of Pierre Aubisse and Jacques Deguilhem. See chapter III, page 157 for the complete account.

<sup>99</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée, procès contre Cassaigne père, pluviôse II, witness no.1.

<sup>100</sup> A.D. Ariège, 14L43-12, procès contre Rouge, *dit* Coussa, frimaire V, witness no. 2.

<sup>101</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17- 7 and 2L97-19, procès contre Meunier et Denave, août 1793.



pour les renvoyer à la fin de la guerre, quittes avec tout le monde.” Yes, said Denave cruelly, “parce qu’avec un coup de canon tout sera payé.”<sup>102</sup>

### The absence of disapproval and counter-revolutionary opinion

Thus, in spite of the sometimes mean-spirited and cantankerous words of rural dissidents, peasants clearly held their own opinions, and, as is occasionally revealed in the archives, boldly expressed them. However, while many of these indirectly expressed opinions have been disapproving in nature, occasionally the scholar catches a rare glimpse of agreement in the statements of bystanders, or, if not agreement, then an absence of disapproval at least. At times, such assent may be discerned where listeners tacitly chose to ignore the seditious words of the speaker. In the trial against Pochet, a tanner accused of leading a band of youths about the town of Casteljalous (Lot-et-Garonne) one night yelling counter-revolutionary slogans, one witness reportedly kept her enraged husband from leaving the house, saying “mon ami, su tu m’aimes, tu resteras tranquille.”<sup>103</sup> Moreover, although some of the expressions of warning we have seen appear to have been meant as threats, others may be interpreted as the response of a companion or a sympathetic bystander who is genuinely concerned for the speaker’s well being. When Henri Lagonde, a peasant from the village of Frechou whom we have met before, was found singing *le Réveil du peuple* in the nearby town of Mézin (Lot-et-Garonne), a local wigmaker, identified only as citoyen LeRoy, stopped to ask him why he was singing that objectionable song, and then suggested that he lower his voice.<sup>104</sup> The trial of Marcel Lafont is another case in point. Witnesses present at the moment when Lafont had interrupted the playing of “ça ira” in the town of Tarascon reported that Lafont’s companion, François Arabeyre had pulled him away from the crowd, saying, “retirons-nous, tu t’exposes,” just as the *gendarmes* were approaching to make the arrest.<sup>105</sup> The two were evidently on friendly terms, as demonstrated by Arabeyre’s use of the familiar form of address,<sup>106</sup> as well as the implication contained in his suggestion that they would

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, witnesses no. 3 and 6.

<sup>103</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L236-76, procès contre Pochet, thermidor IV, witness no. 4.

<sup>104</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L237-115, procès contre Lagonde et sa tante la veuve Lamothe, thermidor V, interrogation, 11 thermidor V.

<sup>105</sup> A.D. Ariège, 13L31-1, procès contre Lafont, fructidor V - vendémiaire VI.

<sup>106</sup> Although the use of the ‘tu’ form of address had become popular during the pre-Thermidorean movement of the *sans-culottes*, the case in question took place in 1797, after the phenomenon had begun to die out. Even during the period of the National Convention, such practices never made the same inroads into the countryside as they had among the urban lower classes. As Ferdinand Brunot wrote in his masterful study of the history of the French language, “Il n’est pas difficile de produire des arrêtés, mais on sait combien la plupart des prescriptions restaient lettre morte,” *Histoire de la langue française: des origines*



leave together. Clearly, the fact that an individual said, “be careful, you could face the guillotine for speaking that way” did not necessarily indicate disapproval.

However, in some – though, admittedly, relatively few – instances, the response of a witness actually indicates that the audience agreed with the seditious words expressed. Often, this occurred when the topic being discussed was religion, for peasants were used to regarding their *curé* as a figure of authority, whose statements were to be accepted as true. Moreover, even though villagers quickly became aware that religion had become an issue of political significance, the faultlessness of one’s opinion on the matter continued to be seen as having less to do with risking the guillotine than with risking one’s soul. In the village of Caumont, in the Ariège, as in so many villages across France, a tremendous schism developed between the supporters of the new, constitutional priest and those who stood by the refractory priest.<sup>107</sup> The latter, Jacques Rogale, whom we first met in chapter III, was brought to trial on the charge of “non-respect de la constitution”, and several of the witnesses who testified to his statements revealed a concurrence with his views. Vincent Ortet, a 54-year-old labourer, said that he could not name the individuals who had made seditious remarks, because so many people in the village sided with the refractory priest that “il n’a pas cru devoir y faire soigneusement attention.” One of those individuals, apparently, was Demond Anouilh, the local tavern-keeper. As Anouilh testified, “il n’eut pas grande peine à croire à la suggestion opérée par le sieur curé, puisque celui-ci a plusieurs fois dit et dans plusieurs occurrences, que la religion était perdue en France, et que les décrets de l’Assemblée nationale établissent un schisme...”<sup>108</sup> In the village of Illartain, also in the Ariège, the general approbation of the words of the refractory priest, Fauroux, is even more evident.<sup>109</sup> According to François Peiré, the words of the *curé* had brought such division to the parish that “il y a bien des personnes et surtout des femmes qui disent encore aujourd’hui hautement qu’on ne peut pas se confesser au nouveau curé constitutionnellement élu.”<sup>110</sup> The accounts of other witnesses revealed that several of the municipal officers had refused to mark the arrival of the new parish priest with the traditional honours. Even the language used by witnesses to describe Fauroux’s words betrays agreement with his statements. François Donat, a local weaver,

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à 1900, nouvelle édition (15 vols. in pts; Paris, 1967), vol. IX, 2<sup>e</sup> partie, pp. 689-94. See also Philippe Wolff, “Le *tu* révolutionnaire”, *A.h.R.f.*, 62 (1990), pp. 89-94.

<sup>107</sup> A.D. Ariège, 11L50-4, procès contre Rogale, juin-août 1791.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, witness no. 8.

<sup>109</sup> A.D. Ariège, 11L50-7, procès contre Fauroux, juillet 1791.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, witness no. 9.



described how Fauroux had “exposé au peuple” that the country was in grave danger, and Raymond Marrot, another weaver, testified that he had “recommandé à ses paroissiens de prier Dieu pour la France.” In both of these depositions, as well as in many others, the vocabulary used by the witnesses implied that Fauroux’s words had been interpreted as benevolent truths rather than seditious maxims.<sup>111</sup>

Such cases, in which peasants stood by the parish priest whom they trusted, are perhaps easy to understand, and evidence of them has survived primarily because authorities were so convinced – particularly near the beginning of the Revolution – that peasants could only be led astray by the ill-intentioned elite, that they overlooked peasant statements of approval as simply evidence of “égarement”. In a very few instances, however, the same like-mindedness can be discerned from the comments of bystanders in cases with topics other than religion. In the case against Benoit Lamarque, for example, the youth who had shouted “vive Louis XVII, à bas la République” in a tavern in the market town of Saverdun (Ariège), one witness testified that another man in the tavern, identified only as Jean Maura, had said, “without fear”, that “ce n’était pas encore le temps de dire cela, mais qu’il faudrait le dire bientôt.”<sup>112</sup> In the case against Sicaire Linard, too, the municipal secretary charged with “fausse publication de décrets”, the local sharecroppers were keen to believe that Linard’s announcement was true, and that they would no longer have to pay their dues.<sup>113</sup> According to Jean Labroue, one of the *notables* of the community, the sharecroppers had insisted that the decree must be among Linard’s affairs, because “ledit accusé n’était pas un sot, et qu’il n’aurait pas dit avoir ce décret en main si réellement il ne l’avait pas eu.” Labroue himself was of the opinion that Linard’s papers were legitimate, as they bore the official seal.<sup>114</sup> However, by far the most interesting of the cases in which the defendant appears to have had support from other individuals is that of Thomas Bordas, who, as we learned in chapter III, had loudly voiced his disgust with the new regime and expressed his desire for a king during a public ceremony in the village of Segonzac, in the Dordogne.<sup>115</sup> Bordas maintained that he was not the only one of that opinion: “plusieurs personnes lui avait conseillé de tenir ferme pour un roi, et cependant ils n’avaient rien dit”; moreover, he continued, “dans d’autres circonstances, beaucoup de personnes auraient dit en sa présence de tels propos.” We

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, witnesses no. 4 and 12; see also witnesses no. 10 and 15.

<sup>112</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-14, procès contre Lamarque; statement revealed in interrogation, 1 octobre 1793.

<sup>113</sup> A.D. Dordogne, B843-2, procès contre Linard, août-septembre 1790.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, witness no.5.

<sup>115</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L45-260, procès contre Bordas, pluviôse IV.



might have dismissed Bordas' claims as the desperate attempt of a condemned man to bring about his own release, if it were not for the admission of Guillaume Mareaire, the local miller. Mareaire confirmed Bordas' words, and testified that the people around him had not dared to speak.<sup>116</sup>

### Evidence of repercussions in the community

As revealing as these statements of assent are, the fact remains that they are extremely rare in the documentation. Indeed, cases in which bystanders volunteered any more than absolutely necessary are, in general, among the minority: most witnesses were unaccustomed enough to, or wary enough of, the apparatus of justice that they kept their answers brief and to the point. However, more general indications that the words of those arrested for seditious speech did have a marked effect on those who heard them are quite common. The fact that, as we have seen, peasants were accustomed to getting news and information through oral channels of communication meant that events of political significance quickly became the talk of the town. Numerous references in the trials themselves indicate that people were talking about the statements or about the incident in general, and such talk could not have helped but influence the villagers' outlook on the world. The account of Martial Philipou, a farmer from the villager of Caillardès, in the Lot-et-Garonne, of a discussion which took place in a local drinking hole, is typical.<sup>117</sup> Philipou recounted how he had met his friend, François Chanet, *dit* Fintié, another farmer, at the blacksmith's shop for a glass of wine some weeks earlier, a Sunday or a Monday, from what he could recall. At one point, the defendant in the case, Antoine Chèse, entered the tavern and said that Salesse, the *agent municipal*, had ordered that everyone gather at the nearby cantonal seat of Cancon for the organization of a local battalion of soldiers. Chèse appeared upset: according to Philipou, he said that "il était trop vieux, qu'il n'y allait pas, qu'il avait passé 50 ans." Chèse asked the blacksmith, an older man named François Rives, if he had been asked to attend; Rives responded that his son wasn't old enough. Chèse replied that if he hadn't been told to go, that he should stay at home, and keep his son at home as well. The conversation on the topic continued, as the men drank their pints of *rouge*.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, witness no. 10.

<sup>117</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L264-31, Tribunal correctionnel de Villeneuve, procès contre Antoine Chèse, sergent, pour avoir tenu des propos contre-révolutionnaires et tendants au rétablissement de la royauté, floréal IV; witness no. 6.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*



The archives of seditious speech are overflowing with similar accounts. The people of the village of Illartain, in the Ariège, for example were actively discussing the words of the refractory priest, Fauroux, whom we have met before: *laboureur* Sylvestre Bareille, although he was called “le Sourd”, testified that “on ne savait pas si les électeurs pouvaient ou ne pouvaient pas nommer les évêques, et qu’autrefois c’était l’église qui les nommait.”<sup>119</sup> In the village of Verteilhac, in the Dordogne, one of the most respected men in the village, an older farmer named Jean Salet *père*, learned that Jean Bernard, *dit* Biotte, had been announcing in the public square that the *assignats* no longer had any value, because a crowd of people arrived on his doorstep to ask *his* opinion.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, perhaps the greatest indication that rural inhabitants became caught up in discussing what this one or that one had said, is the fact that oftentimes, it is by “la voix publique” – the public voice – that local authorities learn of the incident.<sup>121</sup> In the case against Paul Larroze, the royalist we met in the village of Ercé (Ariège), the police commissioner attached to the correctional court in St. Giron wrote that he had “appris par la voix publique” that the event had taken place.<sup>122</sup> The case is exactly the same with Gabriel Labouneille, the wigmaker from Bergerac whose *cris séditieux* had disrupted the conversation at the inn held by citizen Gau: the *directeur du jury* began his declaration, “étant instruit par la voix publique...”.<sup>123</sup> Parié Galet, a day-labourer working near Nérac, also reportedly attempted to dissuade soldiers from rejoining their units, and was denounced by “la rumeur publique.”<sup>124</sup> In at least one case, “la rumeur publique” appears to have been used to describe a very real informant. One of the placards reproduced in chapter III, which began “Vive la noblesse et le clergé”, was posted up in the same town of Nérac. Its presence was reported to the police by an elderly gentleman out for an early morning walk, but the police commissioner’s report nevertheless reads that he learned of the placard “par la rumeur publique”.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, “la rumeur publique” appears to have been so effective that police commissioners could have justified sitting at a table in the local tavern and waiting for the reports to filter in.

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<sup>119</sup> A.D. Ariège, 11L50-7, procès contre Fauroux, juillet 1791, witness no. 13.

<sup>120</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L42, procès contre Bernard, *dit* Biotte, pluviôse II, witness no. 3.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Greenshields, *An Economy of Violence*, p. 179.

<sup>122</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U31, procès contre Larroze, letter from the Commissaire du pouvoir exécutif près le tribunal correctionnel, to the Directeur du jury, arrondissement de St. Giron, 19 vendémiaire VI.

<sup>123</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L46-279, procès contre Labouneille, floréal IV; directeur du jury, acte d’accusation.

<sup>124</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L240, procès contre Galet, messidor VII; report of Cazaneuve, commissaire de police, 16 messidor VII.

<sup>125</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L239-176, procès contre les auteurs d’une affiche posée..., nivôse VI; see the deposition of witness no. 1 and the report of the commissaire de police, 3 nivôse VI.



Another means of determining the effect of seditious words on village listeners involves not the depositions of witnesses, but paradoxically, the absence of their depositions. In some cases, for example, witnesses repeated the defence offered by the accused, and in others, those called forward showed a certain reluctance to testify against their neighbour. Such behaviour might indicate a desire to protect the individual, either because of personal ties or support of their position, or simply that the witness did not want to get involved. At times, the excuses given by witnesses as to why they could not give more information are quite entertaining. Testifiers declared that they were too far away to identify the speaker, or that it was too dark; Jean Amiel Patre, an inhabitant of the mountain hamlet of Merens (Ariège), swore that “n’ayant osé arriver à sa fenêtre, il ne pût reconnaître personne.”<sup>126</sup> Some witnesses had difficulty understanding the speaker – insisting that he or she spoke a different dialect, or indeed that they spoke French – or difficulty remembering what the person had said. Other witnesses, it turned out, were otherwise occupied at the time of the incident: Jean Mesailles, of the hamlet of Argelès (Hautes-Pyrénées), had stayed inside with his sick wife that evening, and François Marc, cited to testify against Jean Vidalot, insisted that he had gone to bed at seven o’clock on the evening in question, because he himself was sick.<sup>127</sup> At times, it is virtually the entire village which stands together and avoids giving evidence against the accused. We have already had the opportunity to cite the case of Michel Rouge, *dit* Coussa, against whom not one of the fifty-eight witnesses called to the stand were willing to give damning evidence.<sup>128</sup> In the case against Gilles Anel and Marcel Dedicu, accused of having shouted, at an assembly for military recruitment, that “il fallait s’insurger et se révolter”, the community response was similar. As noted earlier, eighty witnesses were asked to testify; of these, however, eleven said that they did not say the words couched in the indictment, and the remaining sixty-nine denied having heard anything at all.<sup>129</sup> This type of reaction, and in fact, reluctance to testify in general, seems to be characteristic of isolated villages high in the Pyrenees, a fact which adds weight to the conclusion that such behaviour indicates that the community was united at least in their dislike of outside interference.

In the end, there is a great deal of evidence that the authorities were correct in

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<sup>126</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L33-1, procès contre Aynie et d’autres, février 1793, witness no. 2.

<sup>127</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée (1791-an III), procès contre Begarrie, fructidor VII, witness no. 4; A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d’autres, messidor V-brumaire VI, witness no. 3.

<sup>128</sup> A.D. Ariège, 14L43-12, procès contre Rouge, *dit* Coussa, frimaire V.

<sup>129</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-7, procès contre Anel et Dedicu; délibération de la commune de Taurignan-Vieux, 2 septembre 1793.



their fears that seditious words would affect citizens in rural areas. One of the weapons of the parish priest of Villac (Dordogne), accused of *lèse-nation*, was to tell his parishioners that “il n’était pas nécessaire que tous les citoyens actifs se rendissent à l’assemblée primaire à La Bachelerie; qu’il suffisait qu’il y en fut 3 ou 4 des meilleurs”. Indeed, as reported by the innkeeper and commander of the National Guard, Jean Sevegal, “en effet on s’y rendit en si petit nombre à l’assemblée que le sieur Lafleuronie fut obligé de les renvoyer...”.<sup>130</sup> However, the insistence that the peasants had been “alarmed” or “seduced” or “led astray” comes almost entirely from the statements of the authorities involved in the trials, or from the depositions of elite members of rural society, such as the municipal officers, physicians, and justices of the peace. The statements of peasant bystanders, in contrast, reveal that seditious words did not always evoke a negative reaction: indeed, counter-revolutionary statements often served to bring out pro-revolutionary sentiment. In the case against Bernard Peyraud, for example, a farmhand who attempted to disrupt a recruitment assembly, the majority of the citizens present repeatedly asked the municipal officers to continue reading the decrees, anxious to hear the information that was to be presented.<sup>131</sup> The conversation which ended with Jean Boué, a gardener from Sauveterre, in the Lot-et-Garonne, being denounced for seditious remarks, began when a passer-by remarked that Boué must have been well contented that his previous employer, a noble landowner, was now paying taxes.<sup>132</sup> In general, witness statements give the impression that many aspects of the new regime were appreciated in the countryside. Clearly, the formation of political opinion in rural areas was a more complex process than the authorities supposed.

### Conflicting Political Information and the Formation of Peasant Opinion

Thus, the trials for various types of seditious speech, while necessitating a sensitive reading of both the context and the document itself, nevertheless provide clear indications of rural political opinion. Moreover, the statements of arrested individuals, which vividly portray a range of counter-revolutionary attitudes on numerous topics of interest to country inhabitants, represent only one of the sources of rural opinion: in some

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<sup>130</sup> A.D. Dordogne, B843-1, procès contre Rey, juillet 1790, witness no. 4.

<sup>131</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, Tribunal criminel, procès contre Bernard Peyraud, travailleur de terre, pour provocation au rétablissement de la royauté et émeutes contre-révolutionnaires, frimaire-nivôse II.

<sup>132</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-15, procès contre Boué, nivôse II.



cases, it is equally possible to isolate the more elusive reactions of those villagers present at the scene. Taking both sources into account, the evidence suggests that authorities had reason to be concerned: some villagers certainly held dissenting opinions, and their statements led others to agree, to disagree, to debate – in all instances, to reflect. The issue which is at the heart of this dissertation – how exposure to anti-revolutionary points of view affected the formation of public opinion in the countryside – is thus partially resolved.

However, before arriving at a conclusion, we must now move beyond immediate reactions, beyond the rejoinders and sentiments which were the fleeting responses demanded by the circumstances, to consider the importance of this unofficial, *oral* communication in comparison to the flood of official, *written* communication which was analysed in chapter II. In chapter IV, we approached the question from the perspective of the authorities who attempted to curb verbal dissent, believing that information and ideas spread in an unofficial and uncontrolled manner would threaten the attachment of the peasantry to the Revolution, and thus, the viability of the new order. But to what extent were such fears accurate? How did rural inhabitants make sense of current issues when, on the one hand, they were being overwhelmed by the volume of government communiqués being sent out each week, and, on the other hand, individuals around them were speaking out, literally risking their necks to express a dissident opinion? In this final section, we will examine how peasants interpreted different types of oral communication, sorting through the cacophony of talk and rumour and opinion, and perceiving some news as true and other information as false. We will then examine how peasants reacted, conversely, to official material from the government, as well as to written sources such as newspapers. In several brief case studies, we will see how rural citizens digested conflicting sources of information about the same topic. Finally, as we move into our conclusion, we shall attempt to negotiate the murky waters of peasant political opinion and isolate, based on the sources used for this study, what peasants thought of the Revolution.

### **Different registers of oral communication**

The degree of authority commanded by word-of-mouth communication in the countryside depended upon many different factors. While I have argued, for example, that in some instances, defendants maintained that they had been inebriated as an easy way out of the accusation, there are certainly other cases in which the individual in question was such a habitual drunk that the community had long since stopped listening to what he or



she said. In their attestation to the character of Gilles Anel and Marcel Dedieu, accused of having attempted to start a riot at a recruitment ceremony, the municipal council of the village of Taurignan-Vieux (Ariège) reported that "on ne peut leur reprocher que des ivrogneries presque journalières."<sup>133</sup> Similarly, country inhabitants were clearly aware of the proverbial village idiot, and wasted little time reflecting upon his empty talk. One of the youths in the Vidalot case, Guillaume Cazès, was described by a witness as "généralement malestimé des gens honnêtes".<sup>134</sup> Guillaume Salvaing, a witness who testified against Jacques Lamartigne, the notary charged with various counter-revolutionary slander, was even more unforgiving in his assessment. "Lamartigne a toujours été fort léger dans ses propos," Salvaing affirmed. "Plusieurs personnes le regardaient comme un inconséquent, ce qui faisait que généralement on ne faisait pas trop attention à ce qu'il disait."<sup>135</sup>

However, such cases remain the exception: for the most part, witnesses and bystanders appeared both wary and thoughtful when confronted with seditious ideas, and the decision of how much to take others' words to heart was a delicate affair. As we have already had the occasion to remark, peasants in early modern rural society enquired constantly about what had been heard, passed on, or surmised: as people met at crossroads, after church, or in the tavern for a glass of wine, they talked about the news. During the politically charged and constantly evolving atmosphere of the Revolution, witness accounts brimmed with references to different types of oral communication, and with the phraseology of that classic encounter, in which one passer-by asked another if he had "heard the news". Conversations centred around "les affaires du temps": literally, on current affairs.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, the echoes of conversations which have left traces in the archives

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<sup>133</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-7, procès contre Anel et Dedieu, août 1793 - frimaire II.

<sup>134</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d'autres, messidor V-brumaire VI, witness account 1-13, from Jean-François Pilhes fils, cultivateur, 35 ans, deposition given 1<sup>re</sup> thermidor VI.

<sup>135</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-9, procès contre Lamartigne, germinal II; witness no. 14, Guillaume Salvaing, cultivateur, 61 ans; testimony given 7 nivôse II.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. the interrogation of Louis Sclafer, in which he attested that at the wedding of citoyen Lalba, "il fut question des affaires du temps", by which he was referring to the fact that one person's observation that Sclafer's sister-in-law was wearing the clothes of mourning launched a discussion on the execution of Capet (A.D. Dordogne 24L39, procès contre Sclafer, interrogation, 22 frimaire II); or the deposition of Jean Magne, a peasant witness in the trial against the ex-noble Jean de Malet, who testified that "allant à la messe à Génis avec le dit Malet, celui-ci lui ayant dit dans le cours de leur conversation sur les affaires du temps, que le déposant pouvait être sûr que les émigrés gagneraient," (*Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), procès contre Malet, vol. 1, pp.265-80, witness no. 1, 23 brumaire II). At times the concept was worded slightly differently: a witness in the case against Pierre Grelety said that he and the defendant had spoken "des affaires de la Révolution" (A.D. Dordogne, 24L57-489, procès contre Grelety, witness no. 1, 6 fructidor VII), and Gilles Dubreuil, a *voiturier* who testified against Jean Bernard, *dit* Biotte, describes that "étant sous la halle avec plusieurs personnes à discourir sur certaines choses", the conversation turned to the *assignats* (A.D. Dordogne, 24L42, procès contre Bernard, *dit* Biotte,



are merely the tip of the iceberg, the briefest indication of a society which functioned largely according to the rules of word-of-mouth exchange.

In this respect, part of the mystery is that as literate scholars of the twenty-first century, we feel excluded. As much as we may “eavesdrop” on the conversations transcribed in judicial documents, we cannot hope to grasp all of the subtleties of the exchange, nor to imagine relying upon oral accounts for news of political developments. This lack of understanding is not helped by the fact that the words describing oral discourse have changed in their definitions over the intervening centuries. Although it is somewhat of a myth that the Inuit have dozens of words for snow,<sup>137</sup> the linguistic and anthropological principle stands: social groups develop a precise vocabulary to talk about things important to their culture, and thus it is not surprising that the largely illiterate peasantry of eighteenth-century France had many different words to describe the fabric of their daily lives: oral communication. The study of the Great Fear, in the course of which rumours of brigands, famine and plots swept much of rural France in the summer of 1789, has given rise to an increased interest in oral communication in rural areas, and scholars of the phenomenon have given us a lexicon of words relating to this communication which can be used as a starting point. Georges Lefebvre first wrote that the preponderance of oral transmission in rural society “favorisait, cela va de soi, la multiplication des fausses nouvelles, la déformation et le grossissement des faits, la germination des légendes...”.<sup>138</sup> More recently, Clay Ramsay, in his study of the semantics of the Great Fear, has sifted through the various phrases and expressions used to describe word-of-mouth news, greatly clarifying the issue for modern readers.<sup>139</sup> Ramsay deals at length, for example, with the concept of “bruit”, which, while somewhat analogous with the English term “rumour”, also suggests a possible need for control. Analysing the various uses of the term – including the phrases “faux bruit”, “bruit public” and “sur le bruit” – Ramsay surmises that a “bruit” could be either legitimate or false, depending on the circumstances. After addressing two other terms, “rumeur” – which carried a more negative connotation than

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pluviôse II, witness no.2, 9 pluviôse II). Political conversation was evidently a regular and unexceptional occurrence.

<sup>137</sup> Although the five languages of the peoples of northern Canada and Alaska certainly do not have the “hundreds” of words for snow described in some popular accounts, the variety of description is rather impressive, and anthropologists agree that the principle is a consistent one. See Laura Martin, “Eskimo Words for Snow: A Case Study in the Genesis and Decay of an Anthropological Example,” *American Anthropologist*, 88 (1986), pp. 418–423, or, for a more skeptical study, Geoffrey Pullum, *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax* (Chicago, 1991).

<sup>138</sup> Georges Lefebvre, *La Grande peur de 1789* (Paris, 1932), p. 87.

<sup>139</sup> Ramsay, *Ideology of the Great Fear*, chapter 5.



“bruit” – and “nouvelle”, Ramsay concludes that “word-of-mouth news, while somewhat disreputable, was a potent, living reality”; furthermore, because of the nature of communication in rural France at the outset of the Revolution, the content of the news was “inseparable from the activity of spreading and reacting to news.”<sup>140</sup>

While the phraseology encountered in the course of this study was used in similar ways to those described by Ramsay, the wider range of communicative practices considered here provides us with several additional terms, which in turn lead to a greater range on the scale of credibility. Moreover, the different context of the communication – the daily chatter of peasants in traditional places of exchange, rather than the fast-paced, chaotic transmission of information which characterised the Great Fear – lends itself to a slightly different connotation of communication terms. Of the phrases which suggest that the listener is uncertain as to the truth of the information, however, *bruit* is still one of the most prevalent in the sources. By *bruit*, contemporaries were, indeed, referring to what we might think of as a rumour. It was information, unverified, but clearly of import to the people involved: it existed like echoes of what villagers were saying to each other. At times, *bruits* resembled the traditional use of the word *murmures*, a term typically used by the authorities to designate unrest and dissatisfaction which could potentially erupt into revolt.<sup>141</sup> In one instance, for example, it was a “bruit” which interrupted the reading of laws at a village assembly.<sup>142</sup> A *bruit* could also be started by an individual with dishonest intentions; in those cases, it resembled gossip more than rumour. In the case against the parish priest Rogale, for example, one witness had heard that it was the priest himself who had “semé tout le bruit” before abandoning his position; in the trial of Gain de Montagnac, another priest, a sympathetic witness testified conversely that it was “des mal-intentionnés qui avaient fait courir le bruit qu’il regretait les révenus qu’on lui avait fait perdre.”<sup>143</sup> However, the phrase was also used to denote more reliable information. In the same trial against Gain de Montagnac, for example, several witnesses indicated that they attended mass “sur le bruit qui s’était répandu que M. l’évêque devait prêcher,” which turned out to have been true.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, the reflexive verb is most often used in such a way that there is no one author of the *bruit*: its credibility lies in the fact that it continued to be passed

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131

<sup>141</sup> See Jean Nicolas’ “lexique émotif” of early modern peasant revolts, which includes a discussion of *bruit*, *rumeur* and *murmures*; *Rébellion française*, pp. 19-25.

<sup>142</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, procès contre Peyraud, frimaire-nivôse II.

<sup>143</sup> A.D. Ariège, 11L50-4, procès contre Rogale, juin-août 1791, witness no. 17; A.N. D XXIX 12, Plainte contre M. Gain de Montagnac, mars-septembre 1791, witness no. 6.

<sup>144</sup> A.N. D XXIX 12, Plainte contre M. Gain de Montagnac, mars-septembre 1791, see esp. witness no.7.



on, tacitly accepted by those doing the passing.

Closely associated with *bruit*, and a concept which we have often discussed in this study, is the phrase *ouï-dire*, or hearsay. Indeed, a *bruit* was essentially a type of hearsay which was undefined, in that it was heard from many people but said by nobody in particular. *Ouï-dire* by comparison was more dependable, since the information given was, indeed, what that person had said: the listener then had only to decide whether that individual was a reliable source or not. It is important to note, however, that in common parlance in the period and areas studied, there was only a subtle distinction between the expression *j'ai ouï-dire que le prix du grain est en hausse* (I heard that the price of grain is going up) and *j'ai ouï-dire à Jean que le prix de grain est en hausse* (I heard Jean say that the price of grain is going up). Whereas the first phrase is unspecific, and comes closest to the meaning of *bruit*, the latter phrase indicates that the listener in fact heard the statement first-hand. The peasants who stood as witnesses in seditious speech trials during the Revolution switched back and forth between these two meanings of *ouï-dire* with agility. In the case against Jean-Pierre Pelouse and his fellow carousers, accused of counter-revolutionary speech in the village of Peyssales, near Foix (Ariège), one witness, a woman named Jacquette Treilhard, carefully distinguished the sources of her information:

...dépose avoir ouï dire vaguement que Breton, dit Piparat et autres se rendaient à Peyssales; et qu'il y a deux décades, a ouï dire à la citoyenne Commenay, femme de Pierre Commenay ex-membre du comité révolutionnaire, et à la citoyenne femme de Pierre Tourenq cordonnier, ses voisins, que les coeurs chantaient, que les aristocrates croyaient qu'ils chantaient d'une façon mais que bientôt ils chanteraient d'une autre...<sup>145</sup>

While Treilhard used the same expression, "ouï dire", for both sources of information, it was only with the first that the situation corresponded to the modern meaning of "hearsay". Indeed, the wording is only confusing because we are witnessing the development of the modern expression; for contemporaries, the two types of oral communication likely seemed quite distinct.

A further expression which might be associated with *bruit*, for the simple reason that both imply the noise of the chatter of the populace, is *clameur publique*. Although the 1798 edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* defines the phrase as essentially

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<sup>145</sup> A.D. Ariège, 17L1, Tribunal de police municipale, information contre Jean-Pierre Pelouse, apothicaire, et d'autres, pour propos séditieux, prairial III; witness account no. 27. My emphasis.



a type of crowd noise, a “grand cri” or indistinct racket produced by a group of people,<sup>146</sup> it appears to have been used in the regions studied as an expression more akin to the authority commanded by the *voix publique* or by *l’opinion publique*. Like these two expressions, the *clameur publique* was a tribunal of opinion which carried the pooled wisdom and knowledge of the people, and asserted their conclusion on a given matter. The *clameur publique* could “designate” an individual as having been involved in an incident, for example, and police authorities often acted on information which reached them in this way. In the preamble to the interrogations conducted by the *juge de paix* in the case against Antoine Chèse, the record reveals “que la clameur publique nous a appris que le citoyen Chèse s’est permis de tenir des propos contre-révolutionnaires...”.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, in cases where seditious speech had been accompanied by an *attroupement*, it was often through the *clameur publique* that authorities succeeded in identifying the culprits. In the oft-discussed case against Vidalot and his cohorts, for example, one witness listed the defendants as having been “désignés par la clameur publique pour être du nombre des crieurs formant ledit attroupement.”<sup>148</sup> However, among the sources of information reported by witnesses, “public voice” and “public opinion” still figure very prominently. The very first witness called to testify against François Lafon, accused of having assaulted a man in a tavern, could only testify as to who “l’opinion publique” had designated as the culprits,<sup>149</sup> and in the case against the *curé* Rogale, Jean Meda, *dit* Mailhe, a locksmith, indicated that he had heard of the incident “par la voix publique.”<sup>150</sup> The way in which rural citizens, whether peasants called as witnesses or local authorities, used these phrases implied that information received by the *clameur publique* or by the *voix publique* carried a considerable degree of authority.

Paradoxically, the word which would seem, from our perspective, to imply the most credibility – *nouvelle*, or “news” – was, in fact, quite variable in meaning. On the one hand, rural citizens throughout the documentary record refer to having been “occupé à lire les nouvelles”, or having been present – usually in a tavern or the house of a wealthy neighbour – for the reading of news by a literate individual. In the case against Antoine Pochet and others accused of counter-revolutionary exclamations in the streets of

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<sup>146</sup> *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (1798).

<sup>147</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L264-31, procès contre Chèse, déposition des témoins devant le juge de paix, 15 floréal IV.

<sup>148</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d’autres, messidor V-brumaire VI, witness account 2-28.

<sup>149</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L236-87, procès contre Lafon, pluviôse V, witness no. 1.

<sup>150</sup> A.D. Ariège, 11L50-4, procès contre Rogale, juin-août 1791, witness no. 6.



Villeneuve (Lot-et-Garonne), many of the witnesses were, as Jean Bossuet was, “dans la boutique du citoyen Col, marchand, occupé à lire les nouvelles avec d’autres citoyens.”<sup>151</sup> In another case, this time in the village of St. Julien (Dordogne), the words in question took place in the inn of the widow Lacombe, where citizen Lanaysse “faisait lecture des nouvelles.”<sup>152</sup> However, the word did not merely refer to official, printed news, nor even to the manuscript *nouvelles à la main* which one imagines being sold on street corners. In the eighteenth century and even earlier, *nouvelle* referred to a piece of news, in any format:

NOUVELLE. s. f. Le premier avis qu'on reçoit d'une chose arrivée récemment. Bonne nouvelle. mauvaise, fascheuse nouvelle. fraische nouvelle. vieille nouvelle. nouvelle importante. dire une nouvelle. d'où avez-vous appris cette nouvelle? la confirmation d'une nouvelle. cette nouvelle est vraie, est fausse. estre curieux de nouvelles. escrire des nouvelles. porter des nouvelles. j'ay nouvelles certaines. nouvelles sont venuës. il est venu des nouvelles &c. faire courir un bruit, une nouvelle, semer une nouvelle? repandre une nouvelle. de qui tenez- vous cette nouvelle. Je ne sçavois point cela, c'est une nouvelle pour moy.<sup>153</sup>

As would be expected in the countryside, where most news was delivered orally, the word *nouvelle* held a different connotation, as a type of orally communicated information. Thus it was that Jean Dupré, a *gendarme* in residence at Luz (Hautes-Pyrénées), was asked by several people one morning for “des nouvelles de ce qui s’était passé à Bagnères et à Lourdes”.<sup>154</sup> In another case, Jean-Louis Abadie – who, in the end, was brought up on charges of spreading false news – was questioned by people he met along the road “sur les nouvelles du temps qu’il avait entendu à Tarbes.”<sup>155</sup> Indeed, in some discussions, *les nouvelles* seems to have been used as a synonym for *les affaires du temps*, for as the sources of news in the eighteenth century countryside were limited, the questions “how is the news” and “how are things in the outside world” tended to require the same answer. One witness in the case against Marion Grenier, *dite* Cauredon, in the market town of the Mas d’Azil (Ariège), recalled having asked “comment allaient les nouvelles”, to which the defendant had replied, “que tantôt elles allaient bien, et tantôt mal.”<sup>156</sup> Used in the context of oral communication, the word “news” could in fact refer to information which was markedly unreliable, as in “*fausses nouvelles*”, “*nouvelles exagérées*” and “*malheureuses*

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<sup>151</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L236-76, procès contre Pochet, thermidor IV, witness no. 14.

<sup>152</sup> A.N. W 438-25 and *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), vol. 1, pp. 317-8, procès contre Lacombe, octobre 1793-fructidor II, witnesses no. 3 and 4.

<sup>153</sup> *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1<sup>re</sup> ed. (1694)

<sup>154</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L justice non-côtée (1791-an III), procès contre André Lacrampe, *dit* David, cultivateur, pour propos contre-révolutionnaires, prairial IV, witness no. 7.

<sup>155</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L justice non-côtée, procès contre Abadie et Tronc-Bernis, interrogation, 28 août 1793.

<sup>156</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U22, procès contre Cauredon, fructidor VII - vendémiaire VIII, witness no. 14.



nouvelles”, sources which were all the more dangerous for the false sense of security they gave.

Although we have seen the vocabulary of oral communication from a slightly different perspective, Ramsay’s main point remains true: the distinction between news and rumour was not as obvious as it is today. Clearly, when one is accustomed to getting one’s news orally, one becomes used to distinguishing among sources of differing reliability. News that came by word of mouth from the nearby town was not necessarily false or exaggerated; indeed, it was likely fresher and more accurate than the printed material sent out by the government. In a context where people saw and heard things and passed them on orally, a *rumeur* or a *bruit* could be more trustworthy, from the perspective of the peasantry, than a printed newspaper article, written in French by an urban revolutionary. The *rumeur publique*, it would appear, was usually correct about what had been said in the village tavern, but the *nouvelles* one heard could be false or misleading. As Jean Dartenset found out, the “news” he learned of in the town of Périgueux earned him a charge of *propos royalistes* when he passed it on. In his interrogation, when asked from whom he had heard the news that he had then spread to other travellers, Dartenset responded, “je ne me rappelle pas à qui j’avais entendu dire ces nouvelles, mais je les avais attrapées par ci et par là en voyageant, soit à Périgueux, soit ailleurs.”<sup>157</sup> How, in the end, did inhabitants of the eighteenth-century French countryside distinguish between reports that could be believed, and those which should be dismissed?

A careful study of witness statements and reactions reveals five key factors which influenced how seriously oral reports were taken by rural audiences. Firstly, listeners generally knew when the speaker was an imbecile, a buffoon, a troublemaker or a cad, particularly when the incident took place in a small community, and they paid correspondingly little attention to any information or opinions he attempted to peddle. We have already seen, for example, that villagers living near Cancon (Lot-et-Garonne) knew the notary Jacques Lamartigne to be “fort léger dans ses propos” and an “inconséquent”.<sup>158</sup> Of course, Lamartigne was not the only hothead in south-western rural France to be ignored for such reasons. Another member of the rural elite living in Cancon, the justice of the peace François Cadot d’Argeneuil, was considered a “traquassier”, a “turbulent” and a “brouillou”, and was generally not well-liked; even his wife, reportedly, thought that

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<sup>157</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L40, procès contre Dartenset, interrogation of the defendant, 15 floréal II.

<sup>158</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-9, procès contre Lamartigne, germinal II, witness no. 14 among others.



her husband was “un aristocrate et un coquin.”<sup>159</sup> In several cases of *attroupements séditieux*, witnesses described the questionable character of the defendants, which had evidently prevented them from taking their counter-revolutionary exclamations too much to heart. Jeannet Vidalot of Tarascon (Ariège) was apparently seen as a “polisson” – a mischievous rascal – and Antoine Layrix, also from the Ariège, had a reputation of being an “homme très suspect”, who held nightly gatherings of *aristocrates* in his house.<sup>160</sup> In the trial of Pierre Verge, *dit* Perot, a weaver from Ax-les-Thermes, most witnesses commented only briefly on his seditious exclamations, preferring to air their grievances of previous occasions when he had stolen something from them or threatened them with a knife; one shopkeeper named Antoine Bribes called him “extravagant et dangereux”.<sup>161</sup> Bernard Satouret, finally, the *cultivateur* from Lahitte (Hautes-Pyrénées), was simply well-known for his rejection of all things Republican: he was known, witnesses testified, for an “égoïste et un homme incivique, qui ne respecte pas assez les décrets de la Convention nationale.”<sup>162</sup>

While some factors, such as the reputation of the speaker, led listeners to discount political ideas and opinions put forth by local inhabitants, others caused them to sit up and take notice. One of these involved the type of information contained in the statement: rumours which seemed to be based on concrete data, such as dates or figures, appeared more believable than those which were more vague. Offhanded or even drunken exclamations of “vive le roi” or “merde à la République”, while verbalizing dissent, certainly did not have the same potential to generate a rumour as the following report, given by Pierre Grelety, the unemployed teacher we have met before, who was moving from place to place:

...nous aurions bientôt la paix; il y a un rassemblement de 15,000 hommes cachés à Bordeaux ; de plus, il y a déjà un roi nommé, et que du 20 au 25 du mois d’août il serait placé sur le trône à Lyon...<sup>163</sup>

In comparison to the vivid image of 15,000 royalist soldiers hidden in the nearest large city, vague forecasts, such as those made by a gardener in the Lot-et-Garonne, “qu’il y a bien des affaires déjà, que la contre-révolution a lieu dans plusieurs campagnes”,<sup>164</sup> or the

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<sup>159</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L98-33 and 2L105-10, procès contre Cadot d’Argeneuil, pluviôse-germinal II, witnesses no. 26 and 36; see witness no. 2 for the reference to d’Argeneuil’s wife’s opinion.

<sup>160</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L62-2, procès contre Vidalot et d’autres, messidor V-brumaire VI, witness account no. 1-13; A.D. Ariège, 8L35-2, procès contre Layrix et d’autres, août-sept 1793, witness no. 1.

<sup>161</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L70-5, procès contre Verge, *dit* Perot, fructidor VII, witness no.4, and *passim*.

<sup>162</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L justice non-côtée, procès contre Satouret, nivôse - germinal II.

<sup>163</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L57-489, procès contre Grelety, fructidor VII.

<sup>164</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-15, procès contre Boué, nivôse II.



countless instances of individuals who said “nous aurions bientôt un roi”, could not possibly have had the same effect. Indeed, the repercussions of Grelety’s statement came from the fact that listeners became preoccupied with the possibility that such a forecast might be true.

Seditious remarks which struck an emotional chord were equally likely to have been taken seriously. Faithful parishioners were frightened by remarks from refractory priests that they would be excommunicated, damned, and “aussi noirs que les diables au fond des enfers” if they attended the mass of the constitutional priest: in one instance, an educated bystander reported that “par ces discours”, the local *curé* “a jeté l’épouvante dans l’âme des personnes faibles.”<sup>165</sup> One farmer, as we saw in chapter III, was quite upset by the words of a local refractory priest, Joseph Guraboeuf, who said that his recently consummated marriage was “nul”, because it had been performed by a *curé constitutionnel*.<sup>166</sup> In the Year VII, the words of Marion Grenier, *dite* Cauredon, had a marked effect on her female audience when she reported that “à l’affaire de St. Martory, il y avait eu 600 patriotes tués”, and that “à l’armée d’Italie, il n’avait pas resté un seul français”: as one witness reported, “tous ces propos avaient jetté la consternation dans le quartier, et la désolation dans l’âme des femmes qui avaient leurs maris à l’armée.”<sup>167</sup> Even images of the guillotine or of continued political violence were likely to cause listeners to pay attention. Certainly, one of the reasons the trial against Pelouse and his associates was so drawn-out was that their words had inspired utter terror among those who heard them. “La terreur serait bientôt plus forte qu’elle n’avait jamais été”, it was announced, “et les charrêtes rouges reprendraient leur activité. Le temps des incarcérations reviendra bientôt, et la guillotine sera en permanence. Vous le verrez,” Pelouse tortured his listeners: “bientôt le sang ruisselerait dans les rues de Foix.”<sup>168</sup>

Although citizens of revolutionary France were understandably susceptible to such fearful statements, they nevertheless took other factors into account when estimating whether or not to believe what they had heard. In chapter IV, we saw that the degree of “publicité” of an incident, or how many people were present when it occurred, was of great concern to the prosecuting authorities, for it determined the potential extent of

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<sup>165</sup> See, in general, the case against Rogale, A.D. Ariège, 11L50-4, juin-août 1791, as well as A.D. Ariège, 11L50-7, procès contre Fauroux, juillet 1791, witness no. 11.

<sup>166</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 19L75, procès contre Guraboeuf, mars-avril 1791, testimony of Henri Planchard.

<sup>167</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U22, procès contre Cauredon, fructidor VII, esp. witness no. 3.

<sup>168</sup> A.D. Ariège, 17L1, Tribunal de police municipale, information contre Pelouse et d’autres, prairial III, *passim*; see especially witness accounts no. 23, 24, and 35.



damage to public opinion. However, the degree of publicity with which a statement was made also affected individual listeners, for the fact that the speaker had demonstrated the confidence to stand up before the entire community and make an announcement lent greater credibility to his or her words. We have already seen that Jean Salet, an inhabitant of the village of Verteilhac (Dordogne), learned what Jean Bernard, *dit* Biotte, had been saying about the *assignats* because those who had heard him came to ask his opinion. When Salet asked his visitors what had made them think that “les assignats n’étaient d’aucune valeur”, they responded that Biotte “l’avait publié sous la halle.”<sup>169</sup> Biotte’s choice of venue – the central square of the village – had given his statement, which, while not without truth, was nevertheless an attempt at scaremongering, an aura of authority. The words of Jacques Rogale, the refractory priest resident in the village of Caumont, in the Ariège, likewise received a great deal of attention because of the public way in which he made his sentiments known. “On entend dans tous les coins et recoins dire hautement que les messes du nouveau curé sont nuls”, began one witness’ testimony; another, George Ortet, reported that “il a ouï dire et il est public dans le village que ces faits se sont réellement passés.”<sup>170</sup>

However, as much as these last four factors affected the credibility of seditious statements, for the most part peasants seem to have evaluated information in a regular and logical manner. Indeed, the fifth factor which appears to have been taken into account as villagers considered how much faith to place in the politicised speech of a local individual, was the existence of corroborating information on the topic. As rural society remained heavily dependent upon oral traditions through the Revolution and into the nineteenth century, such substantiating evidence often took the form of a separate oral account. To return to the investigation of the words of Jean-Pierre Pelouse, one witness, a 58-year-old shoemaker named Laurens Boi, put greater faith in the words of the defendant because it was not the first time he had heard the same information:

...dépose... que le bruit était répandu que les choses changeraient bientôt, et qu’il avait ouï dire particulièrement à la fille de service du citoyen Gardebosc, que le citoyen Pelouse lui avait tenu à elle même des propos équivalents aux bruits qui s’étaient depuis répandus.<sup>171</sup>

Thus, Pelouse’s assessment that the political order was about to change merely confirmed what other inhabitants had been saying. In other instances, the statements of individuals

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<sup>169</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L42, procès contre Bernard, *dit* Biotte, pluviôse II, witness no. 3.

<sup>170</sup> A.D. Ariège, 11L50-4, procès contre Rogale, juin-août 1791, witnesses no. 3 and 11.

<sup>171</sup> A.D. Ariège, 17L1, Tribunal de police municipale, information contre Pelouse et d’autres, prairial III, witness no. 34.



were confirmed or refuted by the appearance of official information on the same topic. When Cassaigne père, the *officier de santé* we have met on several occasions, announced in a local tavern the news that “la République avait perdu depuis peu dans une affaire qui avait eu lieu dans la Vendée, de quinze à seize mille hommes”, one witness retorted that he didn’t believe it, because he read the news and he hadn’t seen any reports of such a disaster.<sup>172</sup> Indeed, this example was not an isolated one: with the volume of official information entering rural communities during the Revolution, peasants had plenty of material with which to evaluate the situation on a given topic, and therefore, to arrive at their own conclusions. With this in mind, let us move on to the final section of this chapter, and examine both how peasants evaluated the relative reliability of “official” communication, and how they made sense of conflicting information.

### Relative reliability of “official” communication

In chapter II, we asked whether the ordinary impression of rural communities as isolated and uninformed during the Revolution was correct, and if, indeed, information was not arriving in southwestern villages. The evidence proved just the opposite: although the odd notice might have taken months to arrive or been lost altogether, a tremendous amount of official information did arrive for rural municipalities, such that on average, communities were receiving dozens of printed notices each week. This was a new phenomenon: under the eighteenth-century monarchy, rural parishes had not received nearly so much information from the government, but then, fewer policy changes were made, and fewer events of interest to royal subjects occurred. More importantly, the royal mandate had not included, as the guiding principles of the National Assemblies would, the principle that the people were to be kept informed of the workings of the state. Yet, as we have seen throughout this study, information on the same political topics was circulating through the oral news networks in the countryside, even as it had done for hundreds of years. How did peasants react to official and unofficial information on the same topics? How did they integrate printed information with rumour and hearsay, and how did they form their opinions?

Most of the official information which arrived in villages was not subject to discussion: of the packets of printed notices, the majority were laws, decrees, and government resolutions, not to be “believed” or “disbelieved” but rather, to be understood

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<sup>172</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée, procès contre Cassaigne père, pluviôse II, witness no. 5.



and accepted. There was, of course, the option to dislike and even to resist the laws, but the words of a drunken farmer, said in a tavern, were unlikely to change what the police would continue to enforce. Nevertheless, in some cases, it was the reading aloud of official material which acted as a catalyst for discontents to voice counter-revolutionary opinions. Often, for example, those who were of a mind to prevent the young men of the village from leaving to join the army found the perfect occasion to voice their opinion at recruitment assemblies. Pierre Puiffé, whose callous association of the young men used up in war with the waste and opulence of the dinners of the great aristocrats we read about in chapter III, timed his statements to coincide with the publication of decrees concerning the requisition one Sunday in frimaire II, after vespers.<sup>173</sup> Cassaigne *père*, too, was prompted by the recruitment assembly in the local canton seat, in the Hautes-Pyrénées, to attempt to convince Henriette Burret, the innkeeper from Vic, that it was in her own interest to keep her young male drinkers from leaving for the army,<sup>174</sup> and the exclamations of Gilles Anel and Marcel Dedieu, “qu’il ne faut pas partir!”, were also reportedly prompted by the *tirage au sort*.<sup>175</sup> However, by far the most colourful account of seditious statements inspired by civic ceremonies in which laws were read out was that of Thomas Bordas, the imaginative weaver from the Dordogne who was also introduced in chapter III. When asked, along with the other citizens of St. Vincent de Connezac, to swear an oath of allegiance to the Directory, Bordas reportedly stepped forward and challenged the words and phrases repeated by the president of the administration, insisting that politics was a much more simple affair, and that they should simply take a vote to see what the people wanted.<sup>176</sup>

Indeed, in a handful of cases, rural audiences appear to have been unduly provoked by the reading of official decrees, demonstrating something of a revulsion for any officially disseminated information, and a deep-seated mistrust of those whose job it was to pass the material on. There seems to have been a common misconception in the villages of the Dordogne, for example, in the spring of 1794, that the decrees sent out were in fact *monitoires*, and that, oddly, if the municipal officers read them out three weeks in

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<sup>173</sup> A.N. W389-903 and *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), vol. 1, p.321-2, procès contre Puiffé, nivôse-pluviôse II.

<sup>174</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée, procès contre Cassaigne *père*, pluviôse II.

<sup>175</sup> A.D. Ariège, 8L36-7, procès contre Anel et Dedieu, août 1793 - frimaire II.

<sup>176</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L45-260, procès contre Bordas, pluviôse IV.



a row, the *ancien régime* taxes of land rents and tithes would be reinstated.<sup>177</sup> In the village of Romain-sur-Colle, near Thiviers, this idea resulted in a group of peasants, and one woman in particular, suddenly approaching the podium and tearing the decrees out of the mayor's hands, saying "qu'on ne publiera point, que c'était des monitoires qui feraient revenir les dîmes, et que c'était pour les perdre." The bewildered municipal officers attempted in vain to explain to the crowd that the papers were only decrees, in particular the one which concerned "les [successions] et donations qui fesaient le bonheur de tout".<sup>178</sup> The situation in Sorges, a village in a different canton but in the same district of Excideuil, was similar and yet odd in its own way.<sup>179</sup> A group of peasants were discovered in the village square, cutting up the fresh tree which had been meant to replace the ailing *arbre de la liberté*. When questioned, they explained that "si on laissait planter cet arbre et faire une troisième lecture d'un écrit qui avait été déjà lu deux fois," the rumour went, "les rentes et les dîmes serait rétablies et qu'on imposerait, en outre, sur la commune une somme de seize cent livres pour celui qui ferait cette lecture." Although the authorities in Sorges succeeded in convincing the villagers that the rumour was false, they failed to discover its origin. Such instances might be explained by a general distrust of the illegible information communicated by a government which was traditionally seen as voracious and interfering. However, such theories cannot be universal, for in just as many cases, it was villagers who rebuked disobedient municipal officers for not reporting exactly all of the information they were sent. In one instance, a rural mayor was denounced for withholding half of the laws and decrees he had received,<sup>180</sup> and in the *bourg* of the Mas-d'Azil, in the Ariège, the rumour was rife that "quand il y avait de bonnes nouvelles on les lisaient à la maison commune, mais que quand elles étaient mauvaises, on les brûlait."<sup>181</sup>

While sincere comments of assent and agreement do not tend to be recorded in the archives, there are, nevertheless, indications that much of the time, villagers were respectful of officially disseminated information, or at least, resigned to the new order of

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<sup>177</sup> Olwen Hufton has remarked that south of the Loire, there seems to have been a common belief that the reading aloud of *monitoires* "attirait le malheur sous la forme d'une grêle qui détruisait la récolte", making it very difficult for parish priests to accomplish the task: see "Le paysan et la loi", p. 695.

<sup>178</sup> A.N. W420-955, procès contre Léonard et Paule Meynard, messidor II.

<sup>179</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L43, Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire, procès contre Pierre Bonhomme, cultivateur, et d'autres, pour attroupement séditieux, germinal II.

<sup>180</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, Edep Peyrun, Délibérations du conseil municipal, 6 octobre 1793. The villagers of Peyrun confronted their mayor, Jean Sabatier, because they had learned "par le voisinage" that a law existed regarding the suppression of feudal dues. Sabatier confessed that "il nous aurait caché un très long temps la loi du 17 juillet dernier... et que même il ne fait publier que la moitié des lois qu'il lui parviennent...".

<sup>181</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U22, procès contre Cauredon, fructidor VII-vendémiaire VIII.



things. Some measures, of course, were happily received in the countryside. Masterpieces such as the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and the Constitution of the Year I were judged to be worthwhile achievements, and the law of 10 June 1793 allowing division of common lands brought rejoicing in the poorer Pyrenean villages. The village of Peyrun, in the Hautes-Pyrénées, was thrilled to receive a decree from the local district administration which announced that a 10 million *livre* surplus was to be divided among all communes: the secretary waxed poetic about “nos sages représentants”, and noted that the *agent national* would depart immediately for Tarbes.<sup>182</sup> When faced with rumours and questionable news reports, moreover, rural citizens generally demonstrated confidence in printed texts which proved the contrary. In the market town of Nérac, in the Lot-et-Garonne, a *courrier extraordinaire* arrived one night in August 1792, giving rise to rampant rumours that Paris had fallen and that the entire nation, “même les vieillards”, would have to defend the *patrie*. Although the municipal officers declared that the decree, while announcing a state of *patrie en danger*, aimed only at maintaining order and continuing the recruitment process, the people were reluctant to disperse until they had seen the printed text.<sup>183</sup> Similarly, in the case of Antoine Chèse, who initiated a discussion of the upcoming recruitment assembly, one of the key points of dispute was whether the orders to form a battalion had, indeed, come from the National Convention or not.<sup>184</sup> While rural inhabitants were naturally keen that the laws and decrees turn out to be favourable, they were nevertheless careful to respect the authority of government communiqués in balancing the information available to them.

Newspapers presented a somewhat more complex quandary. “Faits divers” papers did, indeed, circulate in the countryside: educated citizens such as the *juge de paix*, parish priests, wealthier merchants and physicians tended to be the ones with subscriptions, and illiterate peasants would gather at their place of work or on the square on Sundays to hear news items read aloud. Clearly, as printed and widely distributed accounts of current affairs, such papers seemed more authoritative than marketplace rumours. Jean Dartenset, for example, the innkeeper from the village of Vergt (Dordogne), whom we first met in chapter III, was accused of having spread a rumour about a threatened Turkish invasion.

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<sup>182</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, Edép. Peyrun, Délibérations du conseil municipal, 1791-an III; entry for 18 germinal II; the decree was dated 18 ventôse II.

<sup>183</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L163, pièce 17-20, Tribunal du district de Nérac, information relative à un attroupement pour surveiller les parents d’émigrés et aller sauver la patrie; Extrait des délibérations du conseil municipal de Nérac, 2 août 1792.

<sup>184</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L264-31, procès contre Chèse, floréal IV, witness no. 7.



In his interrogation, however, Dartenset maintained that he had merely passed on the rumour out of interest, and that he hadn't believed it himself: "si cela était", he pointed out reasonably, "nous le verions dans les papiers publics."

In at least two other cases, defendants attempted to take advantage of their audience's assumption that newspapers were bastions of truth.<sup>185</sup> Claire Selgines, one of the women accused along with Marion Grenier, *dite* Cauredon, of spreading false news, was reported as having said that she had read in the "Journal de Laysaygues" – apparently, a newspaper which she had read at the tavern kept by the widow Laysaygues – that the Pope was dead and that "on travaillait au rétablissement de la religion."<sup>186</sup> In the case of Daniel Brun and Léonard Simounet, both young farmers living near Bergerac, the deception is even more elaborate. The first time he was interrogated, Brun admitted to having read aloud a passage from a newspaper to which he subscribed, entitled the *Journal des Lois et des Faits*.<sup>187</sup> However, when he was forced into giving up his copy as a piece of evidence, the authorities discovered that a handwritten seditious passage had been inserted on page 581, on top of the regular newspaper column. The paragraph in question read as follows:

...les honnêtes [hommes, amis] de la patrie, sont d'accord qu'il est impossible de remettre le prétendant sur le trône, mais aussi chacun convient qu'il est impossible d'exister sous un gouvernement tel que celui actuel, qui est l'assemblage de tout ce qu'il y a de plus monstrueux, le dernier plan arrangé pourra bien plaire à tout le monde, le voici, Bonaparte sera fait généralissime des troupes de la République, et Barras prendra les rênes du gouvernement...<sup>188</sup>

Apparently, Brun had read the paper not only at his companion Simounet's house, where other inhabitants had gathered, but also at two different taverns, that of citizen Cailloux and of a woman named La Briande. By reading a false passage from a legitimate newspaper, the authorities implied, Brun had attempted to pass off false news as trustworthy.

In the majority of instances in which newspapers are mentioned, however, rural inhabitants seem to have been keenly aware that journalism fell far short of being an exact science. As a result, the information printed in the "papiers nouvelles" was perceived as not having the same level of credibility as, for example, a government communiqué. As

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<sup>185</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L40, procès contre Dartenset, floréal II.

<sup>186</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U22, procès contre Cauredon, fructidor VII-vendémiaire VIII, witness no.4.

<sup>187</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L51 dossier 376, procès contre Brun et Simonet, ventôse VI. The piece of evidence contained in the trial folder reads: "*Journal des Lois et des Faits*, no.73, 14 pluviôse VI; de l'imprimerie de Vezard, rue du Muséum, cloître Germain; on s'abonne à Paris, chez la C. Villiers, directrice du journal, rue des Grands Augustins."

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*



it turned out, in the Brun case just discussed, one of the individuals present in Cailloux' tavern where the news was being read, a shoemaker named Tilhet, remarked, "c'est le journaliste qui a mis cela", implying that it was only his opinion and not necessarily true. It was, in fact, Brun's next remark which earned him an indictment for seditious speech. "Vous ne le croyez pas, eh!", he said; "bien, avant un mois ils n'y seront plus."<sup>189</sup> Indeed, Tilhet was not the only one who saw newspapers, like rumours and oral news reports, as information sources to be questioned and evaluated. In the Year VIII, the departmental administration of the Hautes-Pyrénées attempted to counteract the rumour that the roads maintenance tax would be abolished, a rumour which, they said, had been "répété par quelques journaux",<sup>190</sup> and the municipal council of Sorges, in the Dordogne, deliberated in the wake of the Terror that the excesses and misdemeanours of certain locals during the preceding period had been "alimentées par les papiers nouvelles."<sup>191</sup> As Georges Lefebvre pointed out in his study of the Great Fear, "finalement, la rumeur arrivait aux oreilles d'un journaliste qui, en l'imprimant, lui conférait une force nouvelle."<sup>192</sup> Indeed, the understanding that newspapers sometimes printed false or exaggerated information was so well established that several of the cases examined in this study were dropped in response to the defendant's insistence that they had only been repeating what they had read in a paper. Paul Larroze, for example, whom we have met on several occasions, admitted having said that "certains membres du corps législatif arrêtés pour subir la déportation contre eux prononcée s'étaient échapés à Orléans", but maintained that "ses propos à cet égard ne furent que la répétition d'une feuille publique dont le répondant ne rappelle pas le nom."<sup>193</sup>

Thus, decrees and laws, while not always welcomed, were with some exceptions respected as being true, and newspapers were generally understood to be an authoritative yet heavily edited source of information. However, the greatest potential conflict between "official" and "unofficial" information came in the rubric of news. In some instances, it was not so much that official publications contradicted peasant opinion on a given matter, but rather, that informative decrees simply did not arrive at the ideal time to prevent confusion. The villagers who voiced their disgust with the unstable *assignats*, for example,

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<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, witness no. 1.

<sup>190</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, L639, Administration départementale, Travaux publics: Arrêté manuscrit, 17 frimaire VII.

<sup>191</sup> A.D. Dordogne, Edep. 1664, Délibérations municipales de la commune de Sorges, II - IV; 5 prairial III, p. 18v.

<sup>192</sup> Lefebvre, *La Grande peur*, p. 87.

<sup>193</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U31, procès contre Larroze, vendémiaire VI - brumaire X.



were not incorrect: the *assignats* did, indeed, lose much of their original value, and the government printed far more injunctions against discussing that fact than it did explanations or solutions for those who had been ruined by investing in them. Similarly, rumours and opinions about the state of the foreign war abounded, and either travelled faster than official accounts of progress or setbacks, or else contradicted the little information of that nature that the authorities wished to release. In retrospect, we can tell that some rumours were surprisingly accurate, to the extent that the oral news might even have been the first that villagers had heard of the event. Noël Frié, for example, who was arrested in February 1791 for talking about how the crowns of Europe were uniting against France, was not so far off base, and the reports which Suzanne Guérineau spread to her fellow washerwomen in Bourgoignague (Lot-et-Garonne) in December 1793 about the siege of Landau were quite correct.<sup>194</sup>

In other instances, of course, seditious accounts were wildly fantastical. Jean Dartenset's story about the Turkish ambassador fooled very few villagers in Ste. Marie de Vergt; in reality, Turkey would not become involved in the continental war until 1798. However, Dartenset's words seemed tailor-made to play upon popular fears that the government was somehow involved in a plot to strangle the supply of foodstuffs to the countryside.<sup>195</sup> In the same way, rumours in Years V, VI and VII that the conflict in the Vendée was "autant insurgée que jamais"<sup>196</sup> or that "la Vendée grossissait à un point extraordinaire"<sup>197</sup> were very effective among people who were tired of seeing the youths of their communities leave home dressed in the uniforms of the Republic.

Most often, oral news about developments in the foreign wars consisted in commentaries, often with slight embellishments, of local events, demonstrating that villagers were aware of happenings in the outside world, and were easily forming opinions on them. Less than a month after the declaration of war on Spain on 7 March 1793, a servant named Vallon was arrested in the Dordogne for remarking that the offensives against France's neighbour to the south were a mistake, that "ce qu'il y a dans les églises d'Espagne valait toute la France", and that "l'Espagne avait là de quoi se défendre contre

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<sup>194</sup> A.N. D XXIX 6 (59), procès contre Frié *fiils*, Court, *dit* Parisien, et d'autres, février 1791; A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L98-49 and 2L105-3, procès contre Guérineau, nivôse II.

<sup>195</sup> See Kaplan, *Famine Plot Persuasion*.

<sup>196</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U31, procès contre Larroze, vendémiaire VI - brumaire X.

<sup>197</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U22, procès contre Cauredon, fructidor VII-vendémiaire VIII.



nous.”<sup>198</sup> Marion Grenier, *dite* Cauredon, also supplied an interesting perspective upon the royalist insurrection of the Year VII, near her home in the Ariège, when she said “qu’il y avait 40 ans que les Protestants cherchaient à détruire le roi, que depuis 10 ans on l’avait détruit, et qu’a present l’on verrait.”<sup>199</sup> Finally, Lamartigne, the notary from Cancon whom we have met on numerous occasions, might have made some inappropriate comments, but he was likely not the only one to have been thinking, as he put it, “que la République était foutue”, upon hearing that France’s armies had suffered several defeats in a row.<sup>200</sup> Indeed, in some such cases, the indictments for “false news” appear to reflect the authorities’ attempts to prevent individuals “se réjouir des revers de nos armées ou des troubles qui ont régné dans l’intérieur de la République”, more than any initiative towards correcting the information which circulated in the countryside. After all, a significant part of the “news” is the way in which it is presented. As Cassaigne *père* argued in his own defence: “Il est peut-être arrivé que dans nos conversations sur les événements du jour, ils les ont racontés d’une manière, moi d’une autre, selon les sources où nous puisions nos nouvelles, et peut-être ne disions-nous vrai ni les uns ni les autres.”<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> A.N. W347-686, Tribunal révolutionnaire de Paris, and *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne* (published documents), vol. 1, pp.325-8; procès contre Barrot, Chaveroche and Vallon, août 1793-nivôse II.

<sup>199</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U22, procès contre Cauredon, fructidor VII-vendémiaire VIII.

<sup>200</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L105-9, procès contre Lamartigne, germinal II.

<sup>201</sup> A.D. Hautes-Pyrénées, 2L, justice non-côtée, procès contre Cassaigne *père*, pluviôse II.



## CONCLUSION: DECREES, RUMOURS AND RURAL POLITICISATION

If there is one universal truth concerning French rural society in the eighteenth century, it is that it was composed of an infinite variety of different situations and experiences, for each individual region in France was subject to a unique combination of environmental and social factors. The few scholars who have valiantly attempted to describe the whole of peasant experience at this historical juncture have had a rich palette of departmental and regional studies from which to paint their *tableau*, and yet they have still been forced to make numerous generalizations. The way in which the events of the Revolution, and the changes it brought to the political, social, economic, cultural, and military fabric of the nation, were received in the village is equally complex, for it stemmed from the very aspects of rural communities which made them so different from each other. The confection of a detailed yet comprehensive study of rural reactions to the events of the revolutionary decade must therefore await the publication of local studies of regions, districts, and even villages, in which the reasons underlying various indicators of peasant attachment to the Revolution – from electoral participation and the writing of petitions to the number of *volontaires* and the quantity of grain supplied during periods of crisis – would be revealed, and a common ground for comparison established. Indeed, each of these individual questions – questions which affected rural communities and which acted as a barometer of their political allegiance – has been the subject of monographs and scholarly articles, of research and study both local and national in scope.

For these reasons, an archival study of this length cannot possibly hope to describe in a universal manner how the Revolution was received in the village. However, by considering the question from an original perspective – that of the media through which revolutionary news and ideas were brought to peasants – we have painted a picture both colourful and compelling of the discrepancy between revolutionary maxims and rural reality. As discussed in the introduction, although communication is an integral part of much historical enquiry, it has been largely overlooked as a topic in its own right. In order



to approach the history of the communication of political information in this era, two main types of sources were used: the administrative archives of the institutions and branches of government responsible for disseminating official information, and the judicial trials for crimes of seditious or anti-revolutionary speech. The combination of these two types of sources has told us something of how political information circulated in rural society during the Revolution, and the importance of the process of communication to the reception of that information. Moreover, by concentrating on the dissemination process itself, we have assumed a vantage point from which we can view the arrival of information from the perspective of those receiving it. This attempt to get at the phenomenon of the communication of political ideas “from below” – that is, from the point of view of the peasantry – has been rewarding indeed.

The research perspectives opened up by this combination of sources are threefold. First of all, we have uncovered a rural society which was by no means isolated from news or information about events occurring in the outside world. Not only did a huge quantity of official decrees and leaflets reach village municipal councils, but they were sent out into a society which already received a great deal of news through word-of-mouth. As we have seen, news was brought by travellers and pedlars, exchanged in market towns and village inns, and shared in workshops, in the field, and on the public square on Sundays after mass. Secondly, the various means by which information reached peasants each imparted a unique character to the information itself, such that in each circumstance it was received with a different understanding. Although news which had spread by word-of-mouth was treated with circumspection, depending on the reputation and disposition of the speaker and the existence of corroborating evidence, news announced at the pulpit had its own connotation, as did the reading out of material by those who had been chosen to represent the new regime as municipal officers. Thirdly and finally, the focus on the act of dissemination revealed, quite unexpectedly, not only the opinions of those giving the information, but also those of members of their audience, in response to the information they had heard. In contrast to most scholarly research on the peasantry during the French Revolution, this study has literally allowed us to eavesdrop on conversations which took place in the villages and market towns of two centuries ago, and to hear what peasants thought about the changes and developments occurring around them.

So what, in the end, did peasants “think”? Upon first glance, it appears that they were extremely critical of the Revolution and its works. As we saw in chapter III, royalist sentiment was often expressed in the countryside, from endless repetitions of “vive le roi”



to more thoughtful comments, such as “things were better when we had a king”, or more specifically, “things were better when only one person had his hands in the government coffers, instead of five hundred”. In fact, rural critics could be quite abusive when they spoke of their representatives in Paris. Disagreement with the activities of the National Assembly was often expressed in terms such as, “les membres de l’Assemblée nationale sont des fous; ils ne savent pas ce qu’ils font.” The representatives-on-mission and tax collectors were thieves, the deputies were usurpers, and the district and departmental administrators were *fripons*. At times the criticism of government works came down to a basic lack of respect for anything that came from Paris; indeed, the vulgar suggestion that official decrees were best used as toilet paper was made with remarkable frequency.

It might be objected, and quite justifiably, that this impression of general hostility from the countryside is the result of using sources which were composed for the purpose of prosecuting those who spoke out against the government. If one were, for example, to analyse modern society using only police records, one would be forced to conclude that people in general were crooks, drunks, murderers, and bad drivers. However, the judicial sources of the Revolution, as we have just seen in chapter V, also give indications of the thoughts of a broader cross-section of rural society: the citizens who were present when someone else made a seditious comment, and who were therefore asked to testify at the trial. The opinions expressed in witness depositions, as well as the reported opinions of other individuals who were present, therefore give a more nuanced impression of the political thought of country inhabitants. Although the instances in which those testifying admitted to agreeing with the indicted statements are relatively rare, we can surmise from other situations – such as where witnesses appear to have been reluctant to testify, or when the words of other individuals present label them as sympathisers if not outright allies – that likeminded individuals were more common than the documents at first suggest. In addition, those same trials, together with sources such as the deliberations of municipal councils, provide a fascinating sampling of dry, pro-revolutionary peasant opinion, expressed with the same candidness as the more incriminating seditious remarks.

Moreover, even where peasant assessment of the Republican government or its works is resoundingly negative, that assessment deserves a more nuanced interpretation than it has traditionally received. Indeed, much of what peasants had to say about the Revolution was expressed in a subtle and perceptive manner, demonstrating both intelligence and political awareness. Early rural opposition to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, for example, should not be interpreted as the blind response of a population



resistant to change and manipulated by an overpowering ultramontane church. Instead, they were reasonable fears which turned out to be better-founded than their enunciators realised, for the revolutionaries would, indeed, attempt to destroy Catholic worship. Likewise, “seditious” peasant comments on the rapidly depreciating paper currency were extremely accurate. Between government instability and the tremendous strain on the economy created by a conjunction of poor harvests, political disruption and the war effort, the *assignats* did turn out to be a huge mistake, and the people who had invested in them were, indeed, ruined. Words such as those of Thomas Bordas, who said that “actuellement on avait les mains pleines d’assignats et qu’on n’en pouvait rien faire”,<sup>1</sup> were quickly silenced by the authorities, perhaps as much because they were difficult to hear, as because laws existed against making such statements in public.

In fact, citizens of revolutionary France had eminently understandable opinions: to put it succinctly, they thought more or less what any reasoning individual would have thought, given the same circumstances. It was merely the charged political atmosphere of the time which made pointing out obvious weaknesses in the Republican system a capital offence. The inhabitants of the countryside of the south-west wanted no more than they had ever wanted, or than individuals in their situation would ever desire in the future: freedom of worship, a stable economy, monetary contributions to society at a level which would allow them to feed their families while saving seed for the next spring’s planting, and peace. Indeed, like the bystander at the inn in Bergerac whose statements were reported by a witness in the trial of Pierre Grelety,<sup>2</sup> peasants simply wanted for there to be peace. The pressure and complications of the war in Europe may well have been what pushed rural citizens from tentative support of the new regime to scepticism and, at times, outright verbal abuse. Perhaps it was this underlying sentiment which made the words of Joseph Duthiers strike home: believing that the cause of France’s ills was the fact that the deputies at the Convention could never agree, and that the solution was a return to monarchy, Duthiers left his listeners with the comment that “dès que nous aurions un roi, nous aurions de suite la paix.”<sup>3</sup> Other “seditious” comments showed that peasants had simple, practical political requests. When the authorities asked Jeanne Floissac, the innkeeper from Casseneuil (Lot-et-Garonne), what she thought of the Revolution, her answer was subtle yet clear: “elle a toujours été bien contente,” the interrogation reads, “quand les affaires

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<sup>1</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L45-260, procès contre Bordas, pluviôse IV.

<sup>2</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L57-489, procès contre Grelety, fructidor VII; the exact remark was, “je voudrais bien que nous eussions la paix”.

<sup>3</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L98-28, procès contre Duthiers, frimaire II.



de la République allaient bien.”<sup>4</sup> Another instance involves the *marchand de route* Bonis, *dit* Pékin, whose vague royalist expressions were cited earlier in reference to the fact that he insisted upon the right to hold an opinion. Although he never completely repudiated his words, even while being interrogated by revolutionary officials, he did say that “dans toutes les circonstances il ne cessait de faire les vœux pour la prospérité de son pays.”<sup>5</sup> To anybody who cared to read between the lines, it was clear that for Bonis, that prosperity depended upon a change of government.

Indeed, the words of individuals such as Floissac and Bonis, as well as those of countless rural citizens who testified in seditious speech trials across the nation and throughout the decade, demonstrate that rural public opinion did, in fact, exist. Moreover, peasants were conscious of that fact. In the tiny mountain hamlet of Ercé, high in the Pyrenees of the department of the Ariège, *cultivateur* Paul Larroze went from house to house, as we have seen, “pour savoir de quel parti l’on était.” At the beginning, Larroze reportedly said that “il était le seul qui avait soutenu son opinion à Ercé, mais [que plus tard], tout le monde était de son avis audit lieu.”<sup>6</sup> Larroze, like many other peasants, was well aware of political issues, both local and national, and held concrete opinions on them. The records detailing the political speech – seditious or otherwise – of citizens in the provinces during the Revolution show peasants discussing politics, weighing options, and making informed, intelligent decisions. As such, these sources reveal rural politicisation from a different, and often more genuine, point of view than do more traditional approaches.

One of the strongest indicators of the existence of rural public opinion, and of its significance as a tribunal at which the actions of those in positions of authority or otherwise in the public eye were judged, is the fact that the authorities went to so much effort in attempting to control it. As we saw in chapter IV, each successive revolutionary government was extremely concerned to monopolise what was said about the state and its works in the countryside. The numerous printed decrees and information leaflets being sent into rural areas were bolstered by other methods of insurance, including increasingly blatant propaganda and “civic commissioners” whose task it was to “correct” opinions which had been “led astray”. New institutions were launched in order to monitor seditious speech – including the *Haute cour nationale* and the *Comité des Recherches* – and an

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<sup>4</sup> A.D. Lot-et-Garonne, 2L17-8 and 2L97-22, procès contre Floissac, juillet-août 1793.

<sup>5</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 24L58-494, procès contre Bonis, *dit* Pékin, fructidor VII.

<sup>6</sup> A.D. Ariège, 2U31, procès contre Larroze, vendémiaire VI - brumaire X.



ever-growing body of laws circumscribed what citizens could and could not say in public. However, beyond the importance of such actions to daily life, the long-term implications are truly remarkable: by working to keep rural public opinion from being “corrupted”, the French authorities were admitting not only that peasants had political opinions, but that their opinions were worth winning over.

In this respect, as in so many others, the Revolution marked the start of an era: an era in which the state would both recognise and fear public opinion in the countryside. Politicised speech was seen as dangerous among all sectors of the populace, not merely the urban lower classes. Trials for “seditious words”, “false news” and “seditious exclamations” not only continued to be undertaken by public prosecutors in the provinces, but grew in a number of interesting and very telling ways. The role of cabarets, cafés, markets and fairs, and other public *lieux de rencontre* was increasingly recognised, and policing of such areas for political dissidence intensified accordingly. An order sent out in August 1815 from the prefect of the Ariège to the mayor of every town and village in the department requested that they arrest any individual who had spread or reported false news “soit dans les cabarets, soit dans les marchés, soit dans tous autres lieux publics soumis à votre surveillance,”<sup>7</sup> another, this one to the sub-prefects, stressed that they keep a close watch over “les cafés et autres lieux de réunion publique.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the significance of foreigners, travellers, pedlars and other transients as vectors of false news and objectionable opinions was emphasized. The laws requiring innkeepers to keep registers detailing the identities, origins, and destinations of their guests were renewed regularly, and the police archives overflow with directives and investigations concerning suspicious characters. A circular from the Minister of the Interior, dated 2 March 1823, for example, drew the attention of the prefects of every department upon “les voyageurs qui, sous le prétexte d’intérêts commerciaux, parcouraient la France, et semblaient n’avoir pour objet que de semer sur leur passage des germes de sédition.”<sup>9</sup> Other directives of the era targetted pedlars, “ces marchands ambulants, la plupart vagabonds et sans moyens réels d’existence”, and other “voyageurs qui se permettraient de coupables discours.” Lastly, in comparison to the seditious speech trials of the revolutionary era, the investigations of the nineteenth-century political police were increasingly focussed upon the countryside,

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<sup>7</sup> A.D. Ariège, 5M27 (Police politique: fausses nouvelles et bruits allarmants). Affiche imprimée, préfet aux maires du département, 18 août 1815.

<sup>8</sup> A.D. Ariège, 5M27 (Police politique). Lettre du préfet aux sous-préfets, 20 août 1815.

<sup>9</sup> A.D. Ariège, 5M27 (Police politique). Circulaire du Ministère de l’Intérieur/Directeur de Police aux préfets, datée de Paris, 2 mars 1823.



particularly the more isolated communes. As the prefect of the Ariège reported to the Minister of the Interior in July 1823, corrective bulletins were distributed “jusque dans les communes les plus écartés, où l'éloignement des villes laissait aux malintentionnés toute facilité pour répandre leurs bruits alarmants, et égarer l'opinion publique.”<sup>10</sup>

In other ways, the policing of politicised speech in the nineteenth century evolved away from its origins in the French Revolution. One minor change consisted in the fact that in order to be convicted of the crime of seditious speech, individuals had to be caught “en flagrant délit”; no more would judges and juries spend hours sifting through winding trails of hearsay and reported speech. More importantly, however, was the evolution of political speech prosecution with each change in the political climate. New legislation against crimes of verbal dissent appeared with every change in government and at other times of political insecurity, creating predictable waves of sedition trials: 1815, 1823, and 1830, for example, stand out in the archive as periods of particularly frenetic activity. Naturally, the definition of “seditious” had changed. In 1816, for example, Louis Autésieur, a landowner from the village of Moncaud (Dordogne), was charged with “propos contre le clergé et la noblesse”, comments which undoubtedly would have won him accolades twenty years earlier.<sup>11</sup> In the same department, Guillaume Monteslescot, *dit* Cadillau, was accused of having placarded an “affiche contre le roi” in the town of Bussière-Badil,<sup>12</sup> and Anne Beaudeau, a widow and *cultivatrice* living in the village of Auriac, near St. Germaine de Salembre, was arrested for having “répandu des nouvelles fausses et propres à affaiblir la confiance et la fidélité dues au gouvernement”: her specific words had been that “Buonaparte était arrivé à Toulon à la tête d'une armée d'Anglais et de Russes.”<sup>13</sup> Like the trials of 1793-1794, these cases were most often the products of paranoia and fear, and the majority of defendants were released with a warning. However, by the Revolution of 1848-51, both campaigners for the Left and reactionary authorities well realised the importance of winning the votes of the peasantry.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, never again would the thoughts and opinions of the rural majority be taken for granted.

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<sup>10</sup> A.D. Ariège, 5M27 (Police politique). Lettre manuscrit du préfet de l'Ariège au Ministre de l'Intérieur, 4 juillet 1823.

<sup>11</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 6U497-5, Tribunal correctionnel de Ribérac, procès contre Louis Autésieur, propriétaire aisé, pour propos contre le clergé et la noblesse, octobre-novembre 1816.

<sup>12</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 11U14-2, Cour prévôtal, procès contre Guillaume Monteslescot, *dit* Cadillau, ouvrier en fer, pour une affiche contre le roi, 4 septembre 1816 – 29 janvier 1817.

<sup>13</sup> A.D. Dordogne, 6U497-1, tribunal de Ribérac, procès contre Anne Beaudeau, veuve cultivatrice métayère, pour fausses nouvelles, 13-22 juillet 1826.

<sup>14</sup> Leo A. Loubère, “The Emergence of the Extreme Left in Lower Languedoc, 1848-1851: Social and Economic Factors in Politics”, *American Historical Review*, 73 (1968), pp. 1019-51, and Peter McPhee, *The Politics of Rural Life: Political Mobilization in the French Countryside, 1846-1852* (Oxford, 1992).



## APPENDICES



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APPENDIX A

THE REVOLUTIONARY CALENDAR

On 5 October 1793, the deputies of the National Convention decreed the adoption of a new Republican calendar. Its principal author, Fabre d'Eglantine, had striven to mark the new era in a number of ways. The first day of Year I of the calendar, for example, would be the date of the founding of the Republic – 22 September 1792. The calendar also commemorated the influence of the Enlightenment, instituting twelve “reasonable” months of 30 days each, broken into three ten-day *décades*. Finally, the initiative was in accord with the Republican goal of dechristianization, for the traditional seven-day week with its Christian day of rest would be eliminated, as would the numerous holidays and saints’ days.

Two tables showing the concordance between the revolutionary and Gregorian calendars are given on the following pages. The calculation of dates in the Republican calendar changes slightly in leap years, giving rise to a separate table for the years IV and VIII. The twelve thirty-day months left five days remaining: these were named *sans-culottides*, although they were rebaptised *jours complémentaires* by the Directory. On leap years – year III and VII – a sixth complementary day was added on.

In agreement with its mandate of rationality, the revolutionary calendar’s twelve months were named after the seasons:

Vendémiaire	month of vintage (vendanges)
Brumaire	month of fog (brumes)
Frimaire	month of hoar-frost (frimas)
Nivôse	month of snow (neiges)
Pluviôse	month of rain (pluies)
Ventôse	month of wind (vents)
Germinal	month when plants germinate
Florial	month of flowers
Prairial	month of prairies (prés)
Messidor	month of harvest (moissons)
Thermidor	month of heat
Fructidor	month of fruits

The revolutionary calendar remained in use until 1806, although its adoption in the provinces was largely confined to towns and government offices (see chapter III, pp. 147-48).

Sources: Jones, *Longman Companion*, pp.426-30; Matthew Shaw, “Time and the French Revolution, 1789-Year XIV”, Unpublished D.Phil. Dissertation, University of York , U.K., 2000.



Years II, III, V, VI and VII

	Vend.	Brum.	Frim.	Niv.	Pluv.	Vent.	Germ.	Flor.	Prair.	Mess.	Therm.	Fruct.	sans-culottides
1	22-Sep	22-Oct	21-Nov	21-Dec	20-Jan	19-Feb	21-Mar	20-Apr	20-May	19-Jun	19-Jul	18-Aug	17-Sep
2	23-Sep	23-Oct	22-Nov	22-Dec	21-Jan	20-Feb	22-Mar	21-Apr	21-May	20-Jun	20-Jul	19-Aug	18-Sep
3	24-Sep	24-Oct	23-Nov	23-Dec	22-Jan	21-Feb	23-Mar	22-Apr	22-May	21-Jun	21-Jul	20-Aug	19-Sep
4	25-Sep	25-Oct	24-Nov	24-Dec	23-Jan	22-Feb	24-Mar	23-Apr	23-May	22-Jun	22-Jul	21-Aug	20-Sep
5	26-Sep	26-Oct	25-Nov	25-Dec	24-Jan	23-Feb	25-Mar	24-Apr	24-May	23-Jun	23-Jul	22-Aug	21-Sep
6	27-Sep	27-Oct	26-Nov	26-Dec	25-Jan	24-Feb	26-Mar	25-Apr	25-May	24-Jun	24-Jul	23-Aug	22-Sep*
7	28-Sep	28-Oct	27-Nov	27-Dec	26-Jan	25-Feb	27-Mar	26-Apr	26-May	25-Jun	25-Jul	24-Aug	
8	29-Sep	29-Oct	28-Nov	28-Dec	27-Jan	26-Feb	28-Mar	27-Apr	27-May	26-Jun	26-Jul	25-Aug	
9	30-Sep	30-Oct	29-Nov	29-Dec	28-Jan	27-Feb	29-Mar	28-Apr	28-May	27-Jun	27-Jul	26-Aug	
10	01-Oct	31-Oct	30-Nov	30-Dec	29-Jan	28-Feb	30-Mar	29-Apr	29-May	28-Jun	28-Jul	27-Aug	
11	02-Oct	01-Nov	01-Dec	31-Dec	30-Jan	01-Mar	31-Mar	30-Apr	30-May	29-Jun	29-Jul	28-Aug	
12	03-Oct	02-Nov	02-Dec	01-Jan	31-Jan	02-Mar	01-Apr	01-May	31-May	30-Jun	30-Jul	29-Aug	
13	04-Oct	03-Nov	03-Dec	02-Jan	01-Feb	03-Mar	02-Apr	02-May	01-Jun	01-Jul	31-Jul	30-Aug	
14	05-Oct	04-Nov	04-Dec	03-Jan	02-Feb	04-Mar	03-Apr	03-May	02-Jun	02-Jul	01-Aug	31-Aug	
15	06-Oct	05-Nov	05-Dec	04-Jan	03-Feb	05-Mar	04-Apr	04-May	03-Jun	03-Jul	02-Aug	01-Sep	
16	07-Oct	06-Nov	06-Dec	05-Jan	04-Feb	06-Mar	05-Apr	05-May	04-Jun	04-Jul	03-Aug	02-Sep	
17	08-Oct	07-Nov	07-Dec	06-Jan	05-Feb	07-Mar	06-Apr	06-May	05-Jun	05-Jul	04-Aug	03-Sep	
18	09-Oct	08-Nov	08-Dec	07-Jan	06-Feb	08-Mar	07-Apr	07-May	06-Jun	06-Jul	05-Aug	04-Sep	
19	10-Oct	09-Nov	09-Dec	08-Jan	07-Feb	09-Mar	08-Apr	08-May	07-Jun	07-Jul	06-Aug	05-Sep	
20	11-Oct	10-Nov	10-Dec	09-Jan	08-Feb	10-Mar	09-Apr	09-May	08-Jun	08-Jul	07-Aug	06-Sep	
21	12-Oct	11-Nov	11-Dec	10-Jan	09-Feb	11-Mar	10-Apr	10-May	09-Jun	09-Jul	08-Aug	07-Sep	
22	13-Oct	12-Nov	12-Dec	11-Jan	10-Feb	12-Mar	11-Apr	11-May	10-Jun	10-Jul	09-Aug	08-Sep	
23	14-Oct	13-Nov	13-Dec	12-Jan	11-Feb	13-Mar	12-Apr	12-May	11-Jun	11-Jul	10-Aug	09-Sep	
24	15-Oct	14-Nov	14-Dec	13-Jan	12-Feb	14-Mar	13-Apr	13-May	12-Jun	12-Jul	11-Aug	10-Sep	
25	16-Oct	15-Nov	15-Dec	14-Jan	13-Feb	15-Mar	14-Apr	14-May	13-Jun	13-Jul	12-Aug	11-Sep	
26	17-Oct	16-Nov	16-Dec	15-Jan	14-Feb	16-Mar	15-Apr	15-May	14-Jun	14-Jul	13-Aug	12-Sep	
27	18-Oct	17-Nov	17-Dec	16-Jan	15-Feb	17-Mar	16-Apr	16-May	15-Jun	15-Jul	14-Aug	13-Sep	
28	19-Oct	18-Nov	18-Dec	17-Jan	16-Feb	18-Mar	17-Apr	17-May	16-Jun	16-Jul	15-Aug	14-Sep	
29	20-Oct	19-Nov	19-Dec	18-Jan	17-Feb	19-Mar	18-Apr	18-May	17-Jun	17-Jul	16-Aug	15-Sep	
30	21-Oct	20-Nov	20-Dec	19-Jan	18-Feb	20-Mar	19-Apr	19-May	18-Jun	18-Jul	17-Aug	16-Sep	

\* 6<sup>th</sup> journée sans-culottide in leap years only (III-1795 and VII-1799)



Years IV and VIII

Years IV and VIII																								sans- culottides	
Vend.		Brum.		Frim.		Niv.		Pluv.		Vent.		Germ.		Flor.		Prair.		Mess.		Therm.		Fruct.			
1	23-Sep	23-Oct	22-Nov	22-Dec	21-Jan	20-Feb	21-Mar	20-Apr	20-May	19-Jun	19-Jul	18-Aug	17-Sep 18-Sep 19-Sep 20-Sep 21-Sep												
2	24-Sep	24-Oct	23-Nov	23-Dec	22-Jan	21-Feb	22-Mar	21-Apr	21-May	20-Jun	20-Jul	19-Aug													
3	25-Sep	25-Oct	24-Nov	24-Dec	23-Jan	22-Feb	23-Mar	22-Apr	22-May	21-Jun	21-Jul	20-Aug													
4	26-Sep	26-Oct	25-Nov	25-Dec	24-Jan	23-Feb	24-Mar	23-Apr	23-May	22-Jun	22-Jul	21-Aug													
5	27-Sep	27-Oct	26-Nov	26-Dec	25-Jan	24-Feb	25-Mar	24-Apr	24-May	23-Jun	23-Jul	22-Aug													
6	28-Sep	28-Oct	27-Nov	27-Dec	26-Jan	25-Feb	26-Mar	25-Apr	25-May	24-Jun	24-Jul	23-Aug													
7	29-Sep	29-Oct	28-Nov	28-Dec	27-Jan	26-Feb	27-Mar	26-Apr	26-May	25-Jun	25-Jul	24-Aug													
8	30-Sep	30-Oct	29-Nov	29-Dec	28-Jan	27-Feb	28-Mar	27-Apr	27-May	26-Jun	26-Jul	25-Aug													
9	01-Oct	31-Oct	30-Nov	30-Dec	29-Jan	28-Feb	29-Mar	28-Apr	28-May	27-Jun	27-Jul	26-Aug													
10	02-Oct	01-Nov	01-Dec	31-Dec	30-Jan	29-Feb	30-Mar	29-Apr	29-May	28-Jun	28-Jul	27-Aug													
11	03-Oct	02-Nov	02-Dec	01-Jan	31-Jan	01-Mar	31-Mar	30-Apr	30-May	29-Jun	29-Jul	28-Aug													
12	04-Oct	03-Nov	03-Dec	02-Jan	01-Feb	02-Mar	01-Apr	01-May	31-May	30-Jun	30-Jul	29-Aug													
13	05-Oct	04-Nov	04-Dec	03-Jan	02-Feb	03-Mar	02-Apr	02-May	01-Jun	01-Jul	31-Jul	30-Aug													
14	06-Oct	05-Nov	05-Dec	04-Jan	03-Feb	04-Mar	03-Apr	03-May	02-Jun	02-Jul	01-Aug	31-Aug													
15	07-Oct	06-Nov	06-Dec	05-Jan	04-Feb	05-Mar	04-Apr	04-May	03-Jun	03-Jul	02-Aug	01-Sep													
16	08-Oct	07-Nov	07-Dec	06-Jan	05-Feb	06-Mar	05-Apr	05-May	04-Jun	04-Jul	03-Aug	02-Sep													
17	09-Oct	08-Nov	08-Dec	07-Jan	06-Feb	07-Mar	06-Apr	06-May	05-Jun	05-Jul	04-Aug	03-Sep													
18	10-Oct	09-Nov	09-Dec	08-Jan	07-Feb	08-Mar	07-Apr	07-May	06-Jun	06-Jul	05-Aug	04-Sep													
19	11-Oct	10-Nov	10-Dec	09-Jan	08-Feb	09-Mar	08-Apr	08-May	07-Jun	07-Jul	06-Aug	05-Sep													
20	12-Oct	11-Nov	11-Dec	10-Jan	09-Feb	10-Mar	09-Apr	09-May	08-Jun	08-Jul	07-Aug	06-Sep													
21	13-Oct	12-Nov	12-Dec	11-Jan	10-Feb	11-Mar	10-Apr	10-May	09-Jun	09-Jul	08-Aug	07-Sep													
22	14-Oct	13-Nov	13-Dec	12-Jan	11-Feb	12-Mar	11-Apr	11-May	10-Jun	10-Jul	09-Aug	08-Sep													
23	15-Oct	14-Nov	14-Dec	13-Jan	12-Feb	13-Mar	12-Apr	12-May	11-Jun	11-Jul	10-Aug	09-Sep													
24	16-Oct	15-Nov	15-Dec	14-Jan	13-Feb	14-Mar	13-Apr	13-May	12-Jun	12-Jul	11-Aug	10-Sep													
25	17-Oct	16-Nov	16-Dec	15-Jan	14-Feb	15-Mar	14-Apr	14-May	13-Jun	13-Jul	12-Aug	11-Sep													
26	18-Oct	17-Nov	17-Dec	16-Jan	15-Feb	16-Mar	15-Apr	15-May	14-Jun	14-Jul	13-Aug	12-Sep													
27	19-Oct	18-Nov	18-Dec	17-Jan	16-Feb	17-Mar	16-Apr	16-May	15-Jun	15-Jul	14-Aug	13-Sep													
28	20-Oct	19-Nov	19-Dec	18-Jan	17-Feb	18-Mar	17-Apr	17-May	16-Jun	16-Jul	15-Aug	14-Sep													
29	21-Oct	20-Nov	20-Dec	19-Jan	18-Feb	19-Mar	18-Apr	18-May	17-Jun	17-Jul	16-Aug	15-Sep													
30	22-Oct	21-Nov	21-Dec	20-Jan	19-Feb	20-Mar	19-Apr	19-May	18-Jun	18-Jul	17-Aug	16-Sep													

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APPENDIX B

INDEX OF SEDITIOUS SPEECH TRIALS

The following pages give an index to the seditious speech trials upon which chapters III, IV and V are based. As explained in chapter III, the sample should not be taken as in any way complete or exhaustive; it is merely a collection of statements and incidents which have allowed us to make some inferences regarding the nature of oral political communication in the countryside.

The table is arranged alphabetically by the last name of the principal defendant. The date of the *start* of the trial is also indicated, as well as the profession(s) of the defendant(s) and the principal indictment. Following the profession is a narrow column in which the symbol ♀ appears if one of the defendants was a woman. The department in which the incident occurred is also listed, and archival references are given for both the departmental archive and, where relevant, the National Archives in Paris. For departmental archive judicial sources, the appropriate court can be ascertained by comparing the call number with the source listings in the bibliography. For some cases in the Dordogne, the indication “*Tribunal*” refers to the documents published as: *Tribunal criminel et révolutionnaire de la Dordogne sous la Terreur* (see bibliography for complete reference).

The sixth column, entitled “Outcome”, gives the final judgement of the trial where available. The following abbreviations have been used:

EXEC	Executed	PRIS	Prison sentence
RECL	Reclusion	CONV	Convicted but sentence
DEPD	Deported		unknown
A	Acquitted		
INT	(no ill intentions/not <i>méchamment</i> or <i>à dessein</i> )		
NON	(non lieu/insufficient information)		
PRV	(private conversation)		
VERB	(verbal incident only, judged not serious)		
MIS	<i>Mis en liberté</i> after a change in political climate (1795, 1800)		
INVES	Investigation only - not taken beyond initial information		
UNRES	Unresolved - guilty party undiscovered or unapprehended		
PARIS	Sent on to Paris, where the document trail is lost.		
UNKN	Unknown		

Unfortunately, space precludes the inclusion of greater detail. The general category INT (no ill intentions) includes trials dropped for reasons of drunkenness, as well as instances where defendants were judged to have repeated what they had heard in good faith. Where the verdict was particularly interesting with respect to the dissertation, the reader may be assured that the trial will have been discussed in the text.

The final column, “Citations in Dissertation”, gives the numbers of the pages on which a given trial is noted. That is, the footnote itself can be found on the page number as indicated: the discussion of the trial in the text may continue from the previous page or onto the following page.



#	Defendant(s)	Profession	♀	Date	Indictment	Outcome	Department	Sources		Citations in dissertation
								Dept. Archives	Nat. Archives	
1	Abadie et Tronc-Bernis	cultivateur, homme de loi		1793	Fausse nouvelles	A-INT/PRV	Hautes-Pyrénées	non-côté		151, 231, 235, 281.
2	Albis, d', <i>et al.</i>	prêtres non-assermentés		1792	Infraction à la loi sur les curés	UNKN	Ariège	10L34-2		
3	Anel et Dedieu	peigneur/cardeur de laine		1794	Provocation à la révolte	UNKN	Ariège	8L36-7		204, 223, 231, 258, 274, 276, 287.
4	Argelès, d'	laboureur		1794	Offense à la loi, outrage aux officiers municipaux	INVES	Hautes-Pyrénées	non-côté		151, 226, 242.
5	Aynie, <i>et al.</i>	laboureurs, artisans		1793	Propos et chants contre-révolutionnaires	A-NON	Ariège	8L33-1		162, 273.
6	Barrot et Chaveroche	métayers		1793	Propos contre-révolutionnaires; empêcher recrutement	A-NON	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>	W347-686	240, 246-7, 293.
7	Barus	cultivateur		1794	Proposé d'échanger des assignats	PRIS	Hautes-Pyrénées	non-côté		150, 241.
8	Begarrie	journalière	♀	1799	Cris de vive le roi	UNRES	Hautes-Pyrénées	non-côté		162, 229, 273.
9	Benaud	curé		1789	Fomentation de cabale et sédition	INVES	Dordogne	B2054		173
10	Benet, <i>et al.</i>	aubergiste		1796	Propos séditieux	A	Ariège	13L25-8		125, 214, 238, 241.
11	Bernard dit Biotte	cultivateur		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires et tendant à discréditer les assignats	A-NON	Dordogne	24L42		150, 152, 178, 230, 244, 262, 272, 277, 285.
12	Birol, <i>et al.</i>	volontaires		1796	Cris séditieux	UNKN	Dordogne	25L36		168, 170, 214, 230.
13	Bonfils du Bos	unspecified		1794	Propos royalistes	PARIS	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>		
14	Bonhomme, <i>et al.</i>	cultivateurs	♀	1794	Attroquement séditieux	A?	Dordogne	24L43		288
15	Bonis, dit Pekin	marchand de route		1799	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	A-INT	Dordogne	24L58-494		254, 260, 298.
16	Bordas	tisserand		1796	Discours séditieux	A-VERB	Dordogne	24L45-260		154, 165, 202, 217, 228, 230, 265, 271, 287, 297.
17	Boué	jardinier		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	A	Lot-et-Garonne	2L105-15		150, 153, 274, 284.
18	Bouisson, père et fils	cultivateurs et maçons		1798	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	A-INT	Ariège	8L61-11		228, 244, 250, 252.



#	Defendant(s)	Profession	♀	Date	Indictment	Outcome	Department	Sources		Citations in dissertation
								Dept. Archives	Nat. Archives	
19	Boussaire, <i>dit</i> Chatenet	unspecified		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	EXEC	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>		
20	Branchu du Pilon	propriétaire		1794	Délits contre-révolutionnaires	UNKN	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>		
21	Bréthon	cultivateur		1798	Agitateur - révolte contre la loi (écrits)	PRIS	Lot-et-Garonne	2L83-1		
22	Broliat	curé		1794	Incitation à émeutes contre-révolutionnaires	EXEC	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>	W420-955	147, 267.
23	Brun et Simonet	sans profession/agriculteur		1794	Propos séditieux, attroupement	A-INT	Dordogne	24L51-376		125, 290-91.
24	Cadot d'Argeneuil	juge de paix		1794	Calmonie contre la nation et la Convention nationale	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L98-33; 2L105-10		153, 283.
25	Casaux dit Labotte, <i>et al.</i>	agriculteur		1799	Propos anti-républicains	A-INT	Ariège	2U28		169, 261.
26	Cassaigne <i>père</i>	officier de santé		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	UNKN	Hautes-Pyrénées	non-côté		157, 244, 266, 267, 286-87, 293.
27	Casse, <i>dit</i> Lartigue	agriculteur		1796	Propos séditieux	A-NON	Ariège	13L24-8		164, 217, 258, 267.
28	Castage, <i>et al.</i>	cultivateurs?		1793	Faits et propos contre-révolutionnaires	UNKN	Ariège	8L33-3		
29	Caumont	unspecified		1796	Attroupement armé	A-VERB	Lot-et-Garonne	2L100-27; 2L50-8		
30	Cazes	salariée	♀	1796	Propos - discréditer les assignats	A-INT	Ariège	13L24-1		153, 204.
31	Chantegreil, Bounié, Garrigue	chirurgien (Chantegreil); domestiques		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires et inciviques	RECL	Dordogne	24L36		
32	Chaumès, Belloc	laboureurs		1796	Attroupement séditieux re: curé	A-NON	Lot-et-Garonne	2L50-3		
33	Chaussonnel	mendiant		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	RECL	Lot-et-Garonne	2L105-6; 2L98-23		1-2, 215, 264-65.
34	Chese	sergeur		1796	Propos contre-révolutionnaires, provocation à la royauté	A-NON	Lot-et-Garonne	2L264-31		243, 280, 289.



#	Defendant(s)	Profession	♀	Date	Indictment	Outcome	Department	Sources		Citations in dissertation
								Dept. Archives	Nat. Archives	
35	Coq	laboureur, ancien militaire		1799	Cris de vive le roi	UNKN	Dordogne	25L46-139		
36	Courtiade, <i>dit</i> Pradine	laboureur		1799	Propos contre-révolutionnaires, fausses nouvelles	A-NON	Dordogne	25L46-157		
37	Darbas	prêtre		1791	Propos séditieux	INVES	Haute-Garonne		AN Dxxxix 6 (59)	145, 263.
38	Dartenset	marchand		1794	Propos royalistes	A-NON	Dordogne	24L40		125, 151, 260, 282, 290.
39	Dasti, <i>et al.</i>	(paysans)	♀	1794	Attroupement - cloches	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L98-35		148, 216.
40	Dausse	(paysans)		1794	Attroupement - subsistances	VERB	Lot-et-Garonne	2L31-1		
41	Defis	cultivateur		1793	Entrave à la levée d'hommes	UNKN	Ariège	8L35-1		258
42	Dejean	tailleur		1799	Provocation à la royauté	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L83-2		213
43	Delcurrou, <i>et al.</i>	ménager		1793	Attroupement, émeutes populaires	PRIS	Ariège	8L34-4		146
44	Delrieu	cuisinier		1793	Propos - discréditer la monnaie	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L50-1; 2L98-29		56, 253-54.
45	Dhers, <i>et al.</i>	cultivateur		1793	Propos contre la sûreté publique	A-INT/PRV	Ariège	8L35-6		231
46	Doublet, Delbos	(paysans)	♀	1794	Attroupement séditieux s'opposant à la répartition des grains	A	Dordogne	24L43		
47	Duchain	prêtre		1793	Fanatisation, non-observation des décrets	EXEC	Haute-Garonne	7L202U-53		148
48	Duffour	marin		1794	Chanson contre-révolutionnaires	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L105-14		169
49	Dujarric	marchand		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	PRIS	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>		
50	Dumas	procureur de la commune; ci-devant seigneur		1791	Propos insultants contre la municipalité/Garde nationale	UNKN	Dordogne	17L14		
51	Dupouy	traceur de pierres		1799	Provocation à la royauté	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L83-5		229
52	Durand, <i>et al.</i>	one chirurgien; rest artisans and laboureurs		1793	Troubles dans l'assemblée pour la Garde nationale	PRIS	Ariège	8L33-4		



#	Defendant(s)	Profession	♀	Date	Indictment	Outcome	Department	Sources		Citations in dissertation
								Dept. Archives	Nat. Archives	
53	Duthiers	ci-devant noble		1794	Provocation à la royauté; fausses nouvelles	EXEC	Lot-et-Garonne	2L98-28		156-57, 165, 211, 297.
54	Fargeot	huissier		1794	Propos tendant à empêcher la vente des biens nationaux	EXEC	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>		137
55	Faure, <i>dit</i> Chevalier	cultivateur/ menuisier		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	A-NON	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>	W438-27	
56	Faure, <i>et al.</i>	officier municipal		1793	Opposition au recrutement, émeute	A-NON	Dordogne	24L63		156
57	Fauroux	curé		1791	Propos séditieux, non-respect de la constitution	UNKN	Ariège	11L50-7		141, 142, 145, 248, 269-70, 272, 284.
			♀		Provocation à la royauté; propos inciviques	A-NON	Lot-et-Garonne	2L17-8; 2L97-22; also Monflanquin communal archives		153, 156, 233, 238, 298.
58	Floissac	aubergiste		1793	Propos - discréditer la monnaie républicaine	UNRES	Lot-et-Garonne	2L63-18		
59	Fontard	ci-devant curé		1795	Prône contre la constitution	UNKN	Ariège	10L31-10		143-45, 240, 248.
60	Fossat	vicaire		1791	Retraction de serment en public	A-NON	Lot-et-Garonne	2L264-32		
61	Fouquet	ci-devant prêtre		1795	Délits contre-révolutionnaires; propos à jeter l'alarme	A	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>	W420-955	151, 222.
62	Fournier <i>dit</i> Carré	cultivateur		1794	Propos incendiaires, sédition, provocation de la Garde nationale, arborer une cocarde blanche...	PRIS	Haute-Garonne	AN Dxxxix 6 (59)	AN Dxxxix 6 (59)	164, 170, 173, 235, 250, 260, 292.
63	Frié, <i>et al.</i>	sellier, et d'autres		1791	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	A-NON	Lot-et-Garonne	2L98-48		242
64	Frontin	cultivateur		1794	Ecrits - à exciter une rébellion	INVES	Hautes-Pyrénées		AN Dxxxix 12	143-44, 146, 279.
65	Gain de Montagnac	laboureur		1799	Provocation à la désertion	UNKN	Lot-et-Garonne	2L240-214		49, 155, 272.
66	Galet		♀	1794	Attroupement - empêcher la circulation des grains	A-INT	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>		212
67	Ganivet, <i>et al.</i>	ci-devant maire		1794						



#	Defendant(s)	Profession	♀	Date	Indictment	Outcome	Department	Sources		Citations in dissertation
								Dept. Archives	Nat. Archives	
68	Gautier, <i>dit</i> Viroulet	marchand		1794	Propos séditieux, égarer le peuple	A-INT	Dordogne	24L37		148, 213, 231, 262.
69	Grelety	instituteur		1799	Propos royalistes	A-INT	Dordogne	24L57-589		158, 215, 263, 265, 277, 284, 297.
70	Grenier, <i>dite</i> Cauredon	journalière	♀	1799	Propos royalistes et contre-révolutionnaires	A-MIS	Ariège	2U22		158, 264, 282, 284, 289-90, 292-93.
71	Guérineau	femme d'émigré	♀	1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires; fausses nouvelles	DEPD	Lot-et-Garonne	2L98-49; 2L105-3		210, 292.
72	Guraboeuf	curé		1791, m	Discours séditieux	UNKN	Dordogne	19L75		142, 144-46, 221, 234, 248-49, 284.
73	Hommeau	curé		1792	Refus de lire mandement de l'évêque	RECL	Lot-et-Garonne	2L12-1		248
74	Hubi	orfèvre		1794	Propos - contre corps constitués	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L98-53-54		
75	Joula	curé		1791	Non-respect de la constitution	INVES	Ariège	11L50-5		145-46, 248.
76	La Jeunesse	couvreur		1799	Provocation à la royauté; émigration	UNKN	Lot-et-Garonne	2L83-4		227
77	Labouneille	perruquier		1796	Cris séditieux	A-INT	Dordogne	24L46-279		169, 261, 272.
78	Labro, <i>et al.</i>	(paysans)		1794	Attroupement séditieux	A	Dordogne	24L44		
79	Lachapelle	volontaire hussard		1797	Placards séditieux; fausses nouvelles	PRIS	Dordogne	29L18		176, 227, 249
80	Lachaud, Lagorce	domestique/ cultivateur		1794	Attroupement - empêcher la circulation des grains	UNKN	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>		150
81	Lachèze, <i>et al.</i>	curé		1794	Excitement à attroupement séditieux	UNKN	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>		147, 229
82	Lacombe	cultivateur		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	A-NON	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>	W438-25	173, 240, 281.
83	Lacombe, Cazes	bouchers		1794	Fausses nouvelles	A	Lot-et-Garonne	2L105-5		
84	Lacrampe, <i>dit</i> David	cultivateur		1796	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	A-NON	Hautes-Pyrénées	non-côté		281
85	Lafon	tailleur de pierre		1797	Assassinat	VERB	Lot-et-Garonne	2L236-87		55, 280
86	Lafont	écrivain-notaire		1797	Propos séditieux	A-NON	Ariège	13L31-1		262, 268.



#	Defendant(s)	Profession	♀	Date	Indictment	Outcome	Department	Sources		Citations in dissertation
								Dept. Archives	Nat. Archives	
87	Lafont, <i>et al.</i>	(jeunes)		1793	Cris de vive Louis XVIII	UNKN	Ariège	8L35-2		164
88	Lagonde, Lamothe	cultivateurs		1797	Chansons inciviques	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L237-115		167-68, 253, 268.
89	Lalba, Pebeyre	procureur de la commune		1790	Incitation à soulèvement	CONV	Dordogne	B1600		
90	Lamarque	tailleur		1793	Chant incivique	A-NON	Ariège	8L36-14		146, 163, 270.
91	Lamartigne	notaire		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L105-9		52, 63, 154, 159, 163, 169, 260, 276, 283, 293.
92	Landon, <i>et al.</i>	(paysans)		1794	Troubles à l'occasion du recrutement	UNKN	Dordogne	24L44		
93	Lanti	fondeur d'étain		1794	Écrits liberticides	UNKN	Lot-et-Garonne	2L98-69	W490-435	
94	Lantourne	cultivateur		1794	Propos - discréditer les assignats	A-NON	Lot-et-Garonne	2L51-3		152
95	Larroze	cultivateur		1797	Propos contre le gouvernement	MIS	Ariège	2U31		159, 250, 259, 272, 291-92, 298.
96	Lasescuras	curé		1793	Propos et agissements inconstitutionnels	A	Dordogne	24L63		146, 150, 161, 245-46, 259.
97	Lasjournies	laboureur		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	A-NON	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>	W438-29	
98	Latoupie	domestique		1793	Paroles inciviques	A-NON	Hautes-Pyrénées	non-côté		245
99	Laugénie	cultivateur		1795	Propos contre-révolutionnaires, provocation au trouble	A-INT	Dordogne	24L44		148, 161.
100	Laulanier, <i>et al.</i>	procureur de la commune	♀	1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	A-NON	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>		
101	Laval, <i>dit</i> Répare, <i>et al.</i>	(laboureurs?)		1790	Fausse publications et attroupements	EXEC/PRIS	Dordogne	B1701		153
102	Laval, <i>et al.</i>	(femmes; paysans)	♀	1794	Mouvements séditieux	INVES	Dordogne	24L44		
103	Lavergne, <i>et al.</i>	cultivateurs		1799	Propos séditieux, provocation à la royauté	A-NON	Ariège	8L70-1		149
104	Lavigne	femme domestique	♀	1794	Incitation aux volontaires de déserte	A-NON	Ariège	8L36-15		157, 241.
105	Layrix, <i>et al.</i>	laboureurs, artisans		1793	Attroupements contre-révolutionnaires	UNKN	Ariège	8L35-2		147, 173, 259, 262-63, 265.



#	Defendant(s)	Profession	♀	Date	Indictment	Outcome	Department	Sources		Citations in dissertation
								Dept. Archives	Nat. Archives	
106	Leclerc-Peymaud; Limoges	ci-devant militaire		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	EXEC	Dordogne	24L42		203, 231.
107	Leymarie	prêtre		1797	Propos contre le gouvernement, à inspirer de la haine...	MIS	Dordogne	2U31-1		148
108	Linard	secrétaire de la municipalité		1790	Fausse publications de décrets	UNKN	Dordogne	B843-2		153, 246, 252, 265, 270.
109	Lopes	officier de santé/ militaire		1799	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	MIS	Lot-et-Garonne	2L83-3		
110	Luguet	vicair		1791	Propos inconstitutionnels	A-INT	Dordogne	17L14		145, 229.
111	Madillac, <i>et al.</i>	unspecified		1789	Propos séditieux, actes de violence	UNKN	Dordogne	B834		221
112	Malet	ci-devant noble		1794	Conspiration et propos contre-révolutionnaires	A-NON	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>		157, 266-67, 277.
113	Mandavy	ex-conseiller à la cour des Aides		1794	Écrit contre-révolutionnaires	EXEC	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>		233
		cultivateurs; (Guillaume) - also								
114	Marabal frères	maire		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	RECL	Lot-et-Garonne	2L98-71,72,78; 2L105-4		89, 165, 242, 245.
115	Mathe, <i>et al.</i>	artisans		1793	Troubles séditieux	UNKN	Ariège	8L33-9		146, 161, 245.
116	Mercadé	unspecified		1793	Agitateur - métayers qui payent la dîme	A-NON	Lot-et-Garonne	2L97-42		
117	Meunier, Denave	militaires		1793	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L17-7; 2L97-19		71, 157, 214, 233, 267-68.
118	Meynard, Léonard et Meynard, Paule	cultivateurs	♀	1794	Incitation à soulèvement	EXEC	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>	W420-955	223, 226, 250, 288.
119	Monceret	curé		1792	Propos qui attaquent la constitution	A-NON	Lot-et-Garonne	2L17-1		143, 145, 249, 258
120	Montalembert, <i>et al.</i>	curés		1789	Propos - contre les dirigeants de la nation	PRIS	Lot-et-Garonne	2L118-139		
121	Murat, <i>dit</i> Lapeycherie	domestique		1794	Propos royalistes	EXEC	Dordogne	24L39		158, 257, 266.



#	Defendant(s)	Profession	♀	Date	Indictment	Outcome	Department	Sources		Citations in dissertation
								Dept. Archives	Nat. Archives	
122	Page, dit Pistole	meunier		1794	Propos - discréditer les assignats	A-NON	Ariège	10L37-1		150
123	Pelouse, et al.	apothicaire		1795	Fausse nouvelles	INVES	Ariège	17L1		279, 285-86.
124	Périssé, et al.	aubergiste		1792	Provocation, outrages, menaces à la GN	PRIS	Haute-Garonne	7L202U-4		
125	Peyot	laboureur		1799	Incitation à insurrection royaliste	A-INT	Ariège	8L70-2		
126	Peyraud	travailleur de terre		1793	Provocation à la royauté, émeutes contre-révolutionnaires	EXEC	Lot-et-Garonne	2L98-78		274, 278.
127	Peyriague	cultivateur		1797	Querelle d'auberge	PRIS	Lot-et-Garonne	2L237-109		155, 161.
128	Peyronnel, et al.	artisans et militaires		1796	Propos séditieux	A-NON	Ariège	14L41-4		155, 159, 171, 252.
129	plusieurs	(paysans)	♀	1792	Attroupement - dîme, grain prices...	INVES	Lot-et-Garonne	2L96		
130	plusieurs	unspecified		1792	Attroupement, fausses nouvelles	INVES	Lot-et-Garonne	2L163 (17-20)		289
131	plusieurs	laboureurs		1795	Attroupement séditieux	UNKN	Dordogne	24L44		
132	plusieurs	(paysans)		1796	Enlèvement illégal de cloches	INVES	Lot-et-Garonne	2L264 (34-38)		148
133	plusieurs	soldats déserteurs		1797	Attroupement armé	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L100 (51-55)		71
134	plusieurs	large group; not specified		1798	Provocation à la royauté	A-VERB	Lot-et-Garonne	2L275		
135	Pochet, et al.	tanneur		1796	Chanson contre-révolutionnaires	UNKN	Lot-et-Garonne	2L236-76		168, 268, 281.
136	Puiffé	notaire		1794	Propos fanatiques et contre-révolutionnaires	EXEC	Dordogne	Tribunal	W389-903	158, 287
137	Pujol et Viguié	prêtre/huissier		1794	Propos à fanatiser/émeuter le peuple	PARIS	Ariège	8L36-6		141
138	quidams			1788	Placard séditieux	UNRES	Ariège	1J305		63, 176.
139	quidams			1791	Affiches et placards séditieux	UNRES	Dordogne	19L75		
140	quidams			1797	Affiche - royaliste	UNRES	Lot-et-Garonne	2L239-175		
141	quidams			1797	Placards séditieux	UNRES	Lot-et-Garonne	2L271; 2L105-2		215, 229, 239.
142	quidams			1798	Affiche - royaliste	UNRES	Lot-et-Garonne	2L239-176		174, 273.
143	quidams			1799	Affiche - royaliste	UNRES	Lot-et-Garonne	2L240-220		



#	Defendant(s)	Profession	♀	Date	Indictment	Outcome	Department	Sources		Citations in dissertation
								Dept. Archives	Nat. Archives	
144	<i>quidams</i>			1799	Cris de vive le roi	UNRES	Lot-et-Garonne	2L240-210		
145	Rajade	abbé		1796	Discours contre-révolutionnaires	UNKN	Lot-et-Garonne	2L60-1		63, 148, 155.
146	Ramonêt	laboureur		1794	Empêcher le recrutement	A-VERB	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>	W420-955	156
147	Ravidat	cultivateur		1794	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	A-INT	Dordogne	<i>Tribunal</i>		
148	Rey	curé		1790	Lèse-nation	INVES	Dordogne	B843-1		248, 274.
					propos séditieux, refus d'obéir au commandant de la Garde nationale	UNKN	Ariège	10L30-6		
149	Rey, Luguel	artisans		1791	Propos - insurrection	PARIS	Ariège	8L36-5		147, 213, 226, 227, 236.
150	Roessard	laboureur		1794	Non-respect de la constitution	UNKN	Ariège	11L50-4		144-45, 155, 269, 279-80, 284-85.
151	Rogale, <i>et al.</i>	curé	♀	1791	Propos séditieux	A-NON	Dordogne	25L45-121		
152	Ronon	meunier		1799	Propos séditieux, insultes envers militaires	PRIS	Ariège	13L31-4		
153	Roques, <i>dit</i> Magie	boucher		1797	Rassemblement et cris séditieux	A	Ariège	14L43-12		168, 260-61, 267, 273.
154	Rouge, <i>dit</i> Coussa, <i>et al.</i>	large group; not specified		1796	Fausse nouvelles	PRIS	Ariège	8L33-5		
155	Rousse	cultivateur/propriétaire		1793	Propos - discréditer les assignats	A-NON	Hautes-Pyrénées	non-côté		263, 265, 283.
156	Satouret	cultivateur		1794	Propos - discréditer la monnaie nationale	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L50-2		
157	Sazi	travailleur de terre		1795	Propos contre-révolutionnaires	PARIS	Dordogne	24L39		166, 170, 222, 230, 243, 277.
158	Sclafer	officier de santé		1794	Attroupement séditieux	INVES	Ariège	8L50-2		155
159	Sibiale, <i>et al.</i>	militaires		1795	Propos - avilir le gvt républicain	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L51-5; 2L100 (62,63)		230, 233.
160	St. Martin, <i>dit</i> Bronquet	cultivateur		1796	Propos et actes contre-révolutionnaires	A-INT	Lot-et-Garonne	2L105-11		211
161	St-Just	ci-devant curé		1794	Provocation à la royauté, empêchement des impôts	CONV	Lot-et-Garonne	2L84-5		154
162	Suc	laboureur? (femme)		1797						



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								Dept. Archives	Nat. Archives	
163	Tarri	ci-devant consul, et cultivateur		1794	Propos royalistes et subversives	RECL	Lot-et-Garonne	2L105-1; 2L98-93		137, 241.
164	Thial	ministre du culte catholique		1797	Rétraction du serment	UNKN	Ariège	14L44-5		
165	Thoury	prêtre		1790	Propos séditieux, pousser les paroissiens au trouble	UNKN	Dordogne	B1604		161
166	Verge, dit Perot	tisserand		1799	Cris séditieux		Ariège	8L70-5		164, 283
167	Vidalot, et al.	jeunes artisans		1797	Cris séditieux		Ariège	8L62-2		162, 167, 171, 214, 216, 239, 246-47, 254, 258, 262, 273, 276, 280, 283.
168	Vivié	laboureur		1794	Propos royalistes		Dordogne	24L41		170, 250, 263.



Project Name	Location	Area (sq. ft.)	Volume (cu. ft.)	Weight (lb.)	Notes
Project 1	Location 1	1000	1000	1000	1000
Project 2	Location 2	2000	2000	2000	2000
Project 3	Location 3	3000	3000	3000	3000
Project 4	Location 4	4000	4000	4000	4000
Project 5	Location 5	5000	5000	5000	5000
Project 6	Location 6	6000	6000	6000	6000
Project 7	Location 7	7000	7000	7000	7000
Project 8	Location 8	8000	8000	8000	8000
Project 9	Location 9	9000	9000	9000	9000
Project 10	Location 10	10000	10000	10000	10000



## BIBLIOGRAPHY







PRIMARY SOURCES

1. MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

Archives Nationales

<i>Série D</i>	<i>Comités des Assemblées</i>
D XXIX	Comité des Rapports.
D XXIXbis	Comité des Recherches.
D XL 25	Comité des pétitions, dépêches et correspondances: 120: Correspondance des départements relatif au Bulletin des Lois.
<i>Séries F<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>Administration générale</i>
F <sup>1</sup> a 550-51	Correspondance des commissaires dans les provinces, 1792-1793.
F <sup>1</sup> cIII	Correspondence of the <i>représentants-en-mission</i> , 1793- an II.
<i>Série F<sup>9</sup></i>	<i>Police générale</i>
3065	Réponses des administrations cantonales à une circulaire du 19 nivôse an IV sur l'esprit public.
3268-71	Commissaires de police, dossiers départementaux (1793-1813).
3272-3308	Haute police (objets généraux; détenus).
3448-63	Police des journaux de paris et des dépts, chrono, an4-1815.
<i>Série F<sup>90</sup></i>	<i>Postes et télégraphes</i>
20012-15	Délibérations du Directoire des postes, 1790- prairial anII.
20243	Correspondance de l'Intendance générale des Postes relatif au service des "Petites Postes" établies dans le royaume, 1785-1791.
20245	Lettres et mémoires au Ministre (Tarbé, puis Clavières) sur le service des Postes, 1792-1793.
20246	Correspondance et mémoires de l'Administration des Postes avec les Comités de la Convention nationale, brumaire-thermidor an III.
20368	Employées, directeurs et commis en province, répertoire des lois, ordonnances et décrets, (1793-1834).
<i>Série W</i>	<i>Tribunal révolutionnaire (procédures renvoyées).</i>

(For further detail on the following trials, please see Appendix B).

W347-686	Barrot et Chaveroche	W420-955	Ramonêt
W387-903	Puiffé	W438-25	Lacombe
W420-955	Broliat	W438-27	Faure, <i>dit</i> Chevalier
W420-955	Fournier, <i>dit</i> Carré	W438-29	Lasjournies
W420-955	Meynard (Léonard et Paule)	W490-435	Lanti



**Série AA**      *Collections de lettres et pièces diverses*

AA 32      Papiers Dugas (traduction des décrets de la Convention nationale, 1791-92).

**Série AD+**      *Lois: textes imprimés.*

AD+ 1089      Déclaration du Roi pour le rétablissement de l'ordre et de la tranquillité dans son royaume, 14 août 1789, et Lettre du Roi aux Archevêques et Evêques de son Royaume, 2 septembre 1789.

**Série AF**      *Archives du pouvoir exécutif, 1789-1815*

AF I\*5      Délibérations, Comité des Rapports, 1789-1791.

AF II 58      Troubles et missions dans les départements (1793-IV).

AF II 60      Individus en surveillance, émigrés, mesures de sûreté générale, et l'agence de l'envoi des lois, 1793 – an IV.

AF II 82-146      Archives des représentants-en-mission; 87 (Ariège); 96,97 (Dordogne); 104, 105 (Haute-Garonne); 117 (Lot-et-Garonne); 134 (Hautes-Pyrénées), an II-III.

AF II 168      Correspondance des représentants-en-mission, an II-III.

AF II 65-66      Esprit public, journaux, sociétés populaires, an II-III.

AF II\* 17      Procès-verbaux des séances de la Commission des dépêches, 1793 – an III (registre).

AF II\* 34      Procès-verbaux du Comité des Ponts et chaussées, 1793-an III.

AF II\* 36-38      Procès-verbaux des séances du Comité des transports, postes et messageries, an II - III (registres).

AF II\* 66      Autorisations de distributions of various publications; especially 484 pièce 31 (*Feuille du cultivateur*), 1793 - an III

AF III 40      Publication des lois, an IV-VI.

AF III 41      Rapports du Ministre de la Justice au Directoire, an IV-VII.

AF III 95      Circulaires imprimés, an VI-VIII.

AF III 96-97      Commissaires du Directoire près les administrations, an IV-VI.

**Série BB**      *Ministère de la Justice*

BB<sup>3</sup>19      Haute-Cour d'Orléans, organisation et procédures, 1791-1792.



**Archives Départementales**

Most of the relevant material for this study is to be found in Series L (Période révolutionnaire). Those marked E are documents transferred to the Departmental Archive from the individual communes. Documents classed J have come to the Archives by means other than the normal administrative channels, primarily as donations.

For the details of the judicial sources examined closely, please see Appendix B.



## 1. ARIÈGE

### Pre-Revolutionary Archives

- 1B Justice: Sénéchaussée de Foix (Procès 1B37 (Simonette, 1709); 1B204 (Baron, 1772); 1B224 (Bonne Ours, 1777)).
- 1C Intendances: (1C4, Police: Cabarets, jeux (1691-1779); 1C5, Police: Hôtes et cabaretiers du Donnezan (1755-6); 1C167, Imprimerie et colportage, (1723-86)).
- 1C209 Délibérations des États de Foix; 1741-42, 1745-46, 1749, 1751-54, 1756-57, 1766-68.
- Edép BB Délibérations des conseils municipaux: 220 Edép BB14 (Ax-les-Thermes, 1784-1793); 276 Edép BB3 (Les Cabannes, 1776-1788).
- G287 Visites pastorales, 1753-54, 1762, 1769-72, 1773.

### Dons/Voie extraordinaire

- 1J305 Placard séditieux à Pamiers, 1788, accaparement de grains.
- 34J56 Chanson satirique (police politique), s.d. [XVIII<sup>e</sup>].

### Revolutionary era, Department Papers

- 1L121-122 Délibérations de l'Assemblée administrative du dépt. (1790-91).
- 1L123-125 Délibérations du Directoire du dépt. (1791-an II).
- 1L127 Corresp. du dépt. aux administrations publiques et municipales (an VI-VII).
- 1L129 Corresp. du dépt avec la municipalité de canton de Castillon (an IV-V).
- 1L133-135 Police générale et police de surveillance; esprit public; ordre public (1790-an VIII).
- 1L140 Foires et marchés, an VI.
- 1L167 Postes (an III-VII).
- 1L168-169 Routes, travaux public (1792-an VIII).

### Revolutionary era, District and Canton Papers

- 2L District de Tarascon, an II-III: 1-2 (Délibérations); 5 (Police, esprit public); 8 (Foires et marchés); 15 (Routes et chemins).
- 3L District de Mirepoix, an II-III: 7 (Police, esprit public); 17 (Foires et marchés); 28 (Poste)
- 4L District de St. Giron, an II-III: 22-23 (Correspondance avec les municipalités); 26 (Attroupement contre-révolutionnaire à Prat).
- 5L Administrations municipalités de canton, an IV-VIII. (Police: 11, 35, 46, 54, 86, 141-42; Postes: 22, 65, 159, 188; Correspondance avec le dépt. et avec les municipalités, 101, 113, 130-31).
- 7L Sociétés populaires, an II (7L1, Ax-les-Thermes; 7L4 Daumazan; 7L14, Lavelanet; 7L17, Massat; 7L20, Oust; 7L27, Seix; 7L31, Vicdeossos).

### Municipal Council Deliberations

- 8Edep 1D1 Savignac, 1790-1808.
- 15Edep 1D1 Orlu, 1790-anIII.
- 97Edep D2 Siguer, 1793-an II.
- 104Edep D1 Sentein, 1790-1837
- 134Edep, D1 Sentenac d'Oust, 1790-1793.



### Revolutionary era, Judicial Sources

8L	Tribunal criminel du département de l'Ariège, 1792-an XII.
9L-11L	Tribunaux des districts: Tarascon (9L); Mirepoix (10L); and St. Girons (11L), 1790 - an IV.
13L-15L	Tribunaux correctionnels: Tarascon (13L); Pamiers (14L); and St. Girons (15L), an IV - an VIII.
17L	Tribunaux de police municipale, 1791-an V.

### Post-Revolutionary Archives

5M	Police politique: Attroupements et rassemblements séditieux; Propos et cris séditieux; Chants, libellés, et placards; Fausses nouvelles et bruits alarmants; Presse et publications officielles; Colporteurs et chansonniers; Écrits séditieux (1815-23, 1830-33, 1841).
13M18	Foires et marchés, 1806-1908.
2U	Justice post-révolutionnaire: Procès (an VIII-X).



## 2. DORDOGNE

### Pre-Revolutionary Archives

A49	Actes du pouvoir souverain, 1632-1788. Lettres closes du Roi...portant injonction d'enregistrer des édits, déclarations, lettres patentes, etc.
B series	Sénéchaussées de Périgueux, Sarlat, et Bergerac: Procès. B337, 356, 420, 683, 718, 743, 831, 832, 833, 834, 843, 883, 1589, 1604, 1701.
C367	Procès contre Faurichon et al., accusés d'émotion populaire.
IV E 43 (1)	Délibérations de la municipalité de Domme, 1782-1793
IV E 56 (1)	Délibérations des consuls d'Eymet, 1767-1778
IV E 138	Délibérations de la municipalité de Thiviers, 1771-1790
IV E 166/3	Délibérations des consuls de la ville de Lalinde, 1512-1777

### Revolutionary era, Department Papers

1L119	Lois et décrets; placards (1791-an V).
1L213-19	Travaux publics
1L225-41	Actes et arrêtés des représentants en mission; see esp. 1L232, Lakanal, (nivôse-messidor II).
1L258-71	Registres d'ordre de la correspondance active avec les districts (Belvès, 258; Bergerac, 259-60; Excideuil, 261-62; Montignac, 263-64; Mussidan, 265; Nontron, 266; Périgueux, 267-69; Ribérac, 270; Sarlat, 271).
1L336-41	Circulaires du Directoire et de l'admin centrale du dépt aux municipalités (impr.); 1790-an4 (336), an5-6 (337), an7-8 (338), an4-7 (339), an7 (340,341).
1L342	Envoi du Bulletin des Lois aux administrations et tribunaux (an 4).
1L396	Police: surveillance de la presse et du courrier (1793-anVIII).
1L397-403	Police: Troubles (by canton, district).
1L424	Foires et marchés (an III-VII).
1L501	Service des postes, affaires diverses (1791-an VIII).
1L511	Formation des bataillons de volontaires, engagements, ordres de dépt (1790-an II).
1L585	Navigation: Dordogne (1793-an VIII).



Revolutionary era, District and Canton Papers

- 2L District de Belvès: 130, 132 (chemins); 144 (II-III) envoi des lois et décrets.
- 3L District de Bergerac: 86-87 (chemins).
- 4L District d'Excideuil: 35-36 (Correspondance avec les municipalités); 58 (troubles, esprit public, 1793-III); 94 (Foire et marchés, an3); 116 (relais de la Coquille, 1793-an III); 118 (Garde nationale, listes des citoyens actifs 1790-93); 209 (chemins).
- 5L District de Montignac: 13 (Délibérations); 35 (Corresponce avec les municipalités); 51 (esprit public, troubles); 61 (Police générale); 74 (Foire et marchés, an2-3); 92 (Poste: relais du Bugue, de La Coquille, de Montignac, des Tavernes, de Terrasson); 121 (routes et chemins); 130-32 (envoi et réception des lois et décrets).
- 6L District de Mussidan, 32-33 (Correspondance avec les municipalités, 1791-an IV).
- 7L Nontron, 55 (Garde nationale, 1792-an III).
- 8L Périgueux, 4 (Envois aux municipalités, 1790-an II); 61 (Esprit public 1791-III); 133 (chemins).
- 11L Fonds des municipalités de canton, an IV-VIII: 25 (Relais de poste des Tavernes); 70 (Police, administration municipale de Beaumont).
- 12L Comités de surveillance. 34 (Excideuil); 63-66, (Montignac); 113 (Ribérac).
- 13L6 Société populaire de Monpazier (registre, 1791-an III).

Municipal Council Deliberations

- Edep17, Ajat, 1790-an II.
- Edep26 Angoisse, 1790-1837.
- Edep146, 2D1, 2D2 Biras, 1789-1793.
- Edep219, Le Bugue, 1790-anV.
- Edep252, Cantillac, 1D1, 1790-an X.
- Edep 342, 1D1, Chancellade, 1790-1792.
- Edep460, Corgnac-sur-l'Isle, 1790-anIII.
- E dep471, Coubjours, 1790-93.
- Edep579, Eglise-neuve-de-vergt, anII-VIII.
- Edep 1005, Négrondes, 1793-an III.
- Edep 1050, Pazayac, 1790-an III.
- Edep 1078, Ponteyraud, 1790-1886.
- Edep1123, Quinsac, 1790-an IV.
- Edep 1220, St. Avit-de-Vialard, 1790-93.
- Edep 1664, Sorges, an II-VIII.

Revolutionary era, Judicial Sources

- 14L-22L Tribunaux de district; see esp. 17L (Montignac) and 19L (Nontron), procédures, 1790-an IV.
- 24L Tribunal criminel du département: registres d'audiences, 1792-an VIII.
- 25L-29L Tribunaux correctionnels des districts, an IV-VIII; see esp. 25L (Bergerac) and 29L (Sarlat).



Post-Revolutionary Archives

6U	Tribunaux correctionnels des arrondissements (1800 – )
11U	Cour prévôtal (1800 – )

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**3. HAUTE-GARONNE**

Revolutionary era, Department Papers

1L358-59	Police: Agitation politique; troubles, attroupements, violences (anII-anVIII).
1L360-61	Police: Agitation politique; communes (an II-VIII).
1L364-65	Police: Menées royalistes dans les cantons, surveillance et répression (anV-VIII).
1L366	Police: Agitation politique, menées royalistes: communes (1791-anVIII).
1L369	Police: Esprit public, textes officiels.
1L370	Police: Esprit public, surveillance de presse et recherche d'écrits séditieux.
1L377	Police: Recensement des détenus et suspects dans le district de Saint-Gaudens.
1L378	Police: Listes de personnes mises en état d'arrestation.
1L555	Foires et marchés (an VI-VII).
1L599	Foires et marchés (1791-an VIII).
1L778	Postes et messageries (1792-an VII).
1L977-80	Construction et entretien des routes (1790-an VIII).

Revolutionary era, District and Canton Papers

2L4220-24	District de Saint-Gaudens, Délibérations (1790-an III).
2L4231	District de Saint-Gaudens, Rôles de patentes pour les communes du district (an IX).
2L4239	District de Saint-Gaudens, affaires diverses, y compris le mauvais état des routes.
3L4931	Canton de Bagnères-de-Luchon, Délibérations (anIV-VI).

Municipal Council Deliberations

2E2185	Saman (1D1, 1790-1837).
2E3402	Juzet-de-Luchon (BB2, 1776-1786).
2E3767	Mayregne (1D1, 1790-1837).
2E4492	Cazeaux-de-Larboust (1D1, 1789-1793).

Revolutionary era, Judicial Sources

21L	Tribunal correctionnel du district de Saint-Gaudens, Procès (anIV-VIII).
7L202U	Tribunal criminel du département, Procès (1792-an VIII).
8L204U	Tribunal criminel du département, jugeant révolutionnairement, Procès (an II-III).

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#### 4. GIRONDE

- B Parlement (Non-côté). Parlement de Bordeaux, Juillet 1754, Arrêt ordonnant la confiscation et la destruction d'un écrit clandestin tendant à amoindrir l'autorité du Roi et de l'Église.
- B Parlement (Non-côté). Parlement de Bordeaux, juillet-août 1713, Arrêt ordonnant l'arrestation du nommé Queyroux, pour discours offensants pour la personne du roi.



#### 5. LOT-ET-GARONNE

##### Pre-Revolutionary Archives

- Edep 48 Municipalité d'Astaffort: Jurades XVIII<sup>e</sup>, 6 cahiers. Révocation des autorisations accordées aux cabaretiers.
- Edep 1709 Municipalité de Ste. Bazeille, Police des auberges et cabarets (1784-1790).
- Edep 2084-85 Municipalité de Clairac: Jurades 1753-1768. Police de cabarets; chansons tumultueuses. Ordre aux aubergistes et habitants de fournir une déclaration sur les étrangers qu'ils logent; droit exclusif du maire de dépouiller le courrier.
- Edep 2710 Municipalité de Moncrabeau, Police des cabarets (1740-89).

##### Revolutionary era, Department Papers

- 1L27-37 Délibérations de l'administration du département, 1789-1793.
- 1L296 Police, affaires générales, 1790-an VIII
- 1L314 Foires et marchés, 1793-an 8.
- 1L374-75 Postes et messageries, 1792-an VIII.
- 1L475, 77-82 Travaux publics, 1L475, 1790-an VII.

##### Revolutionary era, District and Canton Papers

- L553-816*bis* Délibérations des administrations des districts (general). In particular:  
     L719 Délibérations de l'administration du district de Nérac (1790-1793).  
     L755 Délibérations de l'administration du district de Tonneins (1790-1791).
- L865 Délibérations de l'administration municipale de Cahuzac, an IV-V.
- L951 Administration municipale du canton de Laplume; foires et marchés, 1792-an 8.
- L1016 Adminbistration municipale du canton de Monflanquin, police et mesures d'ordre public, an IV.
- L1123-1134 Sociétés populaires, 1791-an 3 (Casteljaloux, L1123; Fauillet, L1125; Laroque-Timbaud, L1126; Léviggnac de Seyches, L1127; Tournon-la-Montagne, L1134).

##### Municipal Council Deliberations

All of the following deliberations are classified under the heading Edep, followed by the name of the town or village:



Agen, 2 I I2	Lafox 1D1, 1790-an III
Cantillac, 1790-an X	Lagruère 1D1, 1791
Casseneuve 2D1, 1790-anII.	Monbahus 1D1, 1793-an II
Caumont, 1D1, 1789-1793	Montagnac 1D2, 1792-anIII
Clairac, 1D2, 1790-1792	Pinel-Hauterive, 1D1, 1792-an III
Cuq 1D1, 1790-anII.	Romestaing, 1791-93
Dondas, 1D1, 1791-an II.	St. Pastour 1D1, 1790-an IV
Frégimont 1D1, 1791-an II	St. Pierre de Buzet, 1D1, 1790-91
Fumel, 1D1, 1793-anV	Sauvetat 1D1, 1F2, 1791; 1793-anIII
Galapian, 1D1, 1789-1791.	Tournon (non-classifié), 1790 –
Lafitte-sur-Lot, 1792-an II, 1D1	Villeneuve-de-Duras, 1D1, 1790-an II

See also: Dolmayrac, in addition to 1D1 (1793-an II), 1F1, population, an IV.  
Aubiac, Pétition des habitants pour la création de foires, anV.

#### Revolutionary era, Judicial Sources

2L5-104	Tribunal criminel du département (procédures, 1792-an VIII)
2L105-1-6	Tribunal révolutionnaire du département (procédures, an II-III)
2L118-164	Tribunaux des districts (procédures, 1790-an IV)
2L235-285	Tribunaux correctionnels des districts (procédures, an IV-VIII)
2L305 –	Justices de paix et tribunaux de police correctionnel (investigations, 1790-anX)
	2L443 Bruch: excitation à des attroupements séditieux, 1792-an III.
	2L649 Laplume: appel au rétablissement de la royauté, an VI.
	2L834 Nérac: propos et placards hostiles à la République, 1792-an III.



## 6. HAUTES-PYRÉNÉES

#### Revolutionary era, Department Papers

L114	Délibérations du département, an VI.
123-126ter	Délibérations et arrêtés du Conseil du département, 1790-an II.
L127-32	Délibérations du Directoire du département, 1790-1792.
162-164	Police générale, incl. circulaires du ministère de la police and “demande de renseignements sur la situation politique des cantons” (19 niv an4); an II-IV.
L639	Travaux publics: grande voirie, 1790-an VIII.
L648	Imprimerie et librairie: esp, Journal du département des Hautes-Pyrénées, 1793-an V.
L656	Prêtres insermentés ou réfractaires, surveillance, 1792-an VIII.

#### Revolutionary era, District and Canton Papers

L690-778	Délibérations des districts, 1790-an IV (general).
L779-1047	Délibérations des administrations municipales de canton, an IV-VIII; especially correspondence and <i>enregistrement des décrets</i> (785-88, 809, 827-8, etc.); police files (789, 864bis, 882) and <i>patentes</i> showing presence of cabarets and inns (822, 928-30, 943, 947, 951, 963, 1005).
L1050	Comités de surveillance: Suspects des Hautes-Pyrénées, an II-III.



### Municipal Council Deliberations

Edep Les Angles, 1D2, 1791-1824.

Edep Monléon, 1792-an II.

Edep Peyrun, 1791-anIII .

Edep St. Lary, 1787-1837.

### Revolutionary era, Judicial Sources

The entire judicial archive for the revolutionary period is unclassified, and bears only the inscription "2L". Documents are consulted by asking for a given court at a given period. Cartons consults included:

Tribunaux de district (1790-an III): Adour (procédures 1791-an III); La Neste (procédures 1791 and procédures 1792-an III); La Plaine (procédures 1791-92).

Tribunal criminel (an II-VIII): 14 cartons of *procédures*, by date (see Appendix B).

Tribunaux correctionnels (an IV-VIII): Bagnères (procédures, an IV-VIII); Argelès (procédures, an IV-VIII and procédures, an V-VIII); Tarbes (procédures, an IV-VI and procédures, an VII-VIII).



### *Municipal Libraries*

B.M. Agen	Regional printed sources.
B.M. Foix	Regional printed sources.
B.M. Périgueux	Regional printed sources; also pamphlets and texts from the revolutionary era contained in the Lapeyre collection.
B.M. Toulouse	Pamphlets and <i>imprimés</i> contained in the series BrFa A, C and D, and Rés. D. XVIII.



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